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Alfreda.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE morning, not long after Alex Cameron's departure, Mrs. Trimble heard the housekeeper's bell ring, and at once hastened down stairs to answer it. This bell had been so seldom rung of late that the good woman felt rather curious to know who wanted her.

Much to her surprise, she found a tall, elegantly-dressed lady standing on the doorstep.

There was an undefined something in the air and carriage of this refined-looking woman that commanded Mrs. Trimble's respect at the first glance.

"This is Mr. Cameron's office, is it not? Will you tell his clerk a lady wishes to speak with him?" said the lady in a tone that convinced the housekeeper she was in the presence of some great personage; and all at once remembering her country breeding, she dropped a courtesy as she informed her that the clerk, Mr. Merryman, was not in the office; he had just gone out to his dinner.

"Oh, he won't be long, I suppose," said the lady. "Please show me to Mr. Cameron's chambers, and whilst I await his return, will you be good enough to tell the housekeeper I should like to speak with her."

"I am Mrs. Trimble, the housekeeper, at your service," she replied, dropping another courtesy.

"Well, Mrs. Trimble, I am glad to make your acquaintance," said the lady graciously. "I have heard a great deal about you from Mr. Cameron, and I promised him I would come and see you."

"Thank you, my lady, you are very kind," replied Mrs. Trimble, quite flustered by so much condescending attention. "If you'll be good enough to follow me, my lady, I'll see if the old clerk has locked the office door; he does most times, and then nobody can get in."

On the first landing Mrs. Trimble paused, and diving down into her capacious pocket brought forth a latchkey, and after some little delay opened a door on her right.

"Oh, I'm glad the old clerk hasn't locked the door, for a wonder," she cried. "Will you please to walk this way, my lady."

It was possible to discern objects in the outer chamber, when one's eyes got accustomed to the dim light filtered through the dirt-begrimed narrow window; but when Mrs. Trimble threw open the door of the inner room it was found in total darkness.

"Dear me, I declare the shutters haven't been opened to-day!" exclaimed the housekeeper fussily; "one never can depend on that old clerk. An' would you believe it! he locks the doors every night and takes the keys away with him; in fact, it's a wonder he's left the place unlocked now. He never lets me clean up his office until I comes in with a broom an' pail, an' turns him out with the dust I raises about his ears."

When Mrs. Trimble had opened the shutters and let a flood of light into the room, she turned and saw the lady holding a tiny gold flask in one hand and a pocket-handkerchief in the other, whilst a sweet pungent odour perfumed the air.

"Find the place rather close, don't you, my lady? Always has smelt close and musty since the corpse lay here."

The lady sank into the nearest chair and motioned her to open the window.

"Well, I dare say the smell of this shut-up room is quite overpowering to one coming in from the open air," said the loquacious housekeeper; "but, you see, I'm used to close, shut-up rooms, so I don't mind it. Hope you feel better now, my lady."

"The close air of the room did strike me rather unpleasantly at first," replied the visitor in a faint voice, as she looked around her with a sort of shrinking aversion. "But surely this cannot be Mr. Cameron's private office?"

"Oh, yes, it is, my lady, an' a most comfortable room it was, too, before that dreadful affair took place in it; but somehow I cannot help thinking that the place has got an uncanny, lone-

some look about it ever since—Do you see that dark stain on the floor, my lady? That's blood! All the water in the river yonder wouldn't wash it out; I've tried an' tried myself, but it's no use—the more one scrubs the floor the darker the stain becomes!"

The lady turned her eyes towards the spot indicated by Mrs. Trimble's outstretched finger, turned pale, and gave a low shivering sigh.

"How came that blood stain on the floor?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"Did you never hear that a young nobleman shot himself in Mr. Cameron's chambers, my lady?—or leastways he was shot here; but some thinks as how it wasn't suicide at all."

"What—what can you mean?" gasped the stranger, with dilated eyes and white lips.

"Well, of course 'tis not for me to say, but there's them that has their suspicions, an' say that the murder will out some day."

"Murder!"

"Why, dear, dear, how white an' ill you look! I oughtn't to have let out what I've done—the doctors an' the jury found 'twas suicide; so them as has their suspicions must be mistaken."

"Is there any one suspected of—of the deed?"

"It's not for me to say—'tis the police as suspects——"

"But whom do they suspect?" asked the lady, her face growing pinched and drawn, almost aged.

"How can I tell? I don't know anything about it," replied Mrs. Trimble, drawing in; she was afraid she had gone too far.

"Ah, well, what avails it now? Nothing can bring the dead to life—and—alas, the bare idea that he was murdered is too horrible."

"Well, so it is, but——" here the housekeeper stopped suddenly short, the stranger's eager gaze almost transfixed her; she began to think this might be some relation of the dead man, and she would be held accountable for what at most was only idle gossip. So she adroitly changed the subject by asking the lady what she had come to speak to her about.

"Ah, true; I had almost forgotten," replied the lady, recovering herself by an effort. "Mr. Cameron is an old friend of mine, and I promised, before he went away, that I would come and see the little girl you call Freda, and I will thank you to let me have a

few words with her at once. From what Mr. Cameron told me, I've taken a great interest in the child."

"I'd be glad if I could let you see her, but alas, alas! I've not the slightest idea where she is at this present moment."

"Not know where she is?" cried the lady, fixing her dark eyes searchingly on Mrs. Trimbley.

"No, indeed, my lady," replied the housekeeper, wiping her eyes with her apron, "though I've searched half London through to find her—an' so has Mr. Merryman, too, for the matter of that."

"Have you lost the child?" cried the lady, sinking into a chair and resting her elbow on the table, with her back turned towards the bloodstain on the floor.

Mrs. Trimbley sat down in a chair opposite. She was glad to have some one to talk with; indeed, she never could resist telling her troubles to any one who was ready to listen to them.

"Well, I can't say as how Freda is lost," said she, as she twisted and untwisted the corner of her apron, as though rather at a loss how to begin. "I suppose Mr. Cameron told you the poor darling wasn't my child?"

The lady nodded assent.

"Well, her own mother took her away one evening, when I was out, an' I have not set eyes on her since."

"But surely you must know where the mother lives," said the lady somewhat impatiently, "so please be good enough to tell me where I am likely to find her. Remember I have given my word to Mr. Cameron to look after this child during his absence."

"I really haven't the least idea where the child is, my lady—her mother took her away before Mr. Cameron left. He was in some way about it, because he'd something left in his charge for Freda and her mother. Mr. Merryman has possession of it now, whatever it is, an' Miss Mathers has only to call here an' get it: the old clerk told me so himself."

"But what has this Miss—Miss something or other to do with the matter?" asked the lady superciliously.

"Ah, to be sure!" cried Mrs. Trimbley as though recollecting herself. "Here have I been talking to your ladyship as though you knew all about this affair from beginning to end: Miss Mathers is Freda's mother; but didn't Mr. Cameron tell you that when he asked you to look after the child?"

"He told me her mother was a widow," replied the lady severely.

"Well, for the matter of that, Freda's mother says so too. That young nobleman, who shot himself in this very room, did go through a ceremony of marriage with Alice Mathers, that's certain; else he wouldn't have put an end to himself soon as ever he found out that she an' her child were still in existence."

"Ah, did he see the child?" asked the lady, in a voice that trembled spite of herself. "You will oblige me very much if you will tell me all you know about this sad affair from the beginning."

Mrs. Trimble needed no further pressing; she settled herself in her chair and began quite literally at the beginning, from the time when she was servant to Mrs. Mathers until the hour when Alice left the shelter of her roof with Freda in her arms.

Yet, prolix as her tale was, the lady listened with breathless interest; never once interrupting her, except to ask some leading question, when Mrs. Trimble appeared inclined to bring in a little too much of her own family history.

When at length Mrs. Trimble paused, rather for want of breath than lack of words, the lady asked if she were certain that the person she called Mathers had been alone in the room with the young nobleman on the night of his death.

"Certain?" echoed Mrs. Trimble. "Why, of course I am. They went downstairs together, an' I heard them enter this very room; no one saw him afterwards, until Mr. Cameron came in an' found the poor young lord lying dead on the floor, shot through the heart. Alice suffered a great wrong at his hands, and his sin found him out at last!"

The lady steeped her handkerchief in the contents of the small flask and bathed her brow with the perfume once more.

In her admiration of the slender white hand and sparkling rings that adorned the taper fingers, Mrs. Trimble failed to notice how that hand trembled, and how deadly pale were the lady's lips and brow.

"This is a very sad story you have been telling me," said the lady in a calm even tone of voice. "I have not the least doubt but that the woman, with her child, will turn up shortly: you said, did not you, that Mr. Merryman, the clerk, had something left in his care for them? Have you any idea what it is?"

"Well, money, I should think," answered Mrs. Trimble readily,

and casting her eyes around the room with a sort of inquiring look ; "a large sum, too, one would imagine, else why does the old man lock up the chambers so carefully, an' not allow a creature to enter the place when he's absent ?"

Quite unobserved by the housekeeper, the lady's eyes followed hers around the room, and rested for an instant on one particular spot.

"The clerk would not be likely to keep a large sum of money here, when he could lodge it in a bank for safety," remarked the lady carelessly. "But I thought you said he was only gone to his dinner and would be back shortly : I have an engagement for three o'clock, so I cannot possibly wait any longer ; I will call on some future day and see him about Freda. Having promised Mr. Cameron to look after this child, I am rather anxious she should be found and cared for."

"So am I, too, my lady, an' so is Mr. Merryman ; he walks miles an' miles after office hours, hoping he may come across Freda somewhere—he's told me, in confidence, that she nor her mother won't want for nothing again, once he finds them, an'—but please remember this is a secret," said Mrs. Trimble mysteriously, and speaking almost in a whisper—"I'm told that Freda is a great heiress, an' there's documents left with Mr. Merryman to prove it."

"Ah !" ejaculated the lady with a start, rising to her feet. "I must really be going. May I ask you for a glass of water before I go ? I am rather thirsty."

"I'll fetch you some in a moment," answered the housekeeper, preparing to leave the room.

"Thanks, so much," said the lady graciously. "But please don't be long ; I am rather in a hurry to be gone."

The instant the door closed behind Mrs. Trimble, the lady darted forward and took down a small bunch of keys that hung on a nail, half hidden by an old shooting jacket ; she had spied them out when her eyes followed Mrs. Trimble's around the room, and had just asked for the water, rightly concluding that the housekeeper would leave the room to fetch it.

She, however, was really thirsty, and at once emptied the glassful Mrs. Trimble brought her, with feverish haste, her hand trembling so much as she carried it to her lips that some of the water was spilt on her dress.

Promising to call again, as she wanted to see Mr. Cameron's clerk, and was anxious also about Freda, she at once left the place.

But it was not until after Mrs. Trimby had watched her out of sight from the door-step that she remembered how remiss she had been in not asking the lady her name.

"How stupid of me!" she cried, quite vexed with herself. "I dare not tell Mr. Merryman I've let a stranger go in and sit down in Mr. Cameron's private room without so much as asking her name; why, he'd be quite angry at my letting her in at all, seeing he was out."

CHAPTER XXX.

HORACE MERRYMAN always wore a melancholy, depressed air, but he had now become far more woe-begone-looking than a mute at a third-rate funeral.

He no longer indulged in his favourite walks through Highgate Woods, nor might he be seen wending his way, as aforetime, through the pleasant roads that led to Harrow or Barnet; he now confined his walks to the city streets, turning down blind alleys and exploring dingy out-of-the-way courts, where needlewomen and the workers in the great commercial hive most do congregate. Quiet, forsaken-looking nooks these city courts for the most part are, where children are never seen at play, and nothing but weary plodding footsteps are heard from early morn to darkening eve.

He had a way of stopping and peering after any tall gaunt woman that passed him by, and sometimes he followed them to ask their names, in a trembling eager way, that suggested inebriety or a growing tendency towards Colney Hatch.

If in walking along the street he happened to descry a fair child in the distance, he quickened his pace almost to a run, and when at length he overtook her, he would look wistfully into her face, exclaiming, with tears in his eyes: "Ah! it's not Freda after all—what a pity! Do you know any little girl by the name of Freda, my dear?"

Sometimes he went into corner shops in cheap neighbourhoods and made a small purchase, just to enable him to make inquiries after the objects of his search; but he made his inquiries in such a confused, rambling manner that the shopkeepers,

for the most part, failed to comprehend him; yet they spoke him civilly because he looked so careworn and sad. At times a kindly-hearted tradesman would take an interest in his tale, and remember that he had seen a tall dark woman with a fair little girl passing his shop. In all probability she would be found lodging in the next street—there was a widow who did lace cleaning living at number ten, third floor back; she had left her card at his shop, but it got lost somehow. He remembered it was No. 10, Pinching Street; she was middling tall and as thin as a lamp-post.

But in vain Mr. Merryman's inquiry; the lace cleaner at number ten proved to be an old lady with a false front, who was very thin certainly, and there ended all the resemblance she bore to the woman he sought; this was one of the many false scents he followed up, until he grew weary and began to lose all hope of finding Alice and her child.

He often held long consultations with Mrs. Trimble on this one absorbing object of his life.

He made her relate over and over again every particular she knew about Alice and Freda, often reverting to the ceremony of marriage that Alice alleged had been gone through between her and the late Lord Chineron.

They also compared notes daily with each other, concerning their united endeavours to trace both mother and child.

Mrs. Trimble's son, "Gavy," as she called him, to distinguish him from David his father, had also taken up the search warmly, and he being a youth of imaginative temperament, suggested to Mr. Merryman the desirableness of at once possessing themselves of a barrel organ and a monkey.

"You see, sir," said he, with the wisdom acquired in London streets, "that all the children flock to the doors and windows when they hear the organ-grinder a-coming; well, you grinds and exhibits Jacko with his tricks, and we are safe to see Freda afore long, up at one of the windows a-looking out. I'd be earning something, too; them organ chaps picks up a lot of pence, and whilst you was a-grinding, I'd have my eye on the windows and look after the coppers."

Mr. Merryman was quite struck with Gavy's acuteness, but he did not quite like the idea of turning street musician until every other effort failed him. He told Gavy, however, that he was

quite willing to purchase or borrow, both barrel-organ and monkey if he, Gavy, liked to follow that line on his own account.

Gavy shook his head at this proposal. "It wouldn't do for a young 'un to take up that line without an old gent. to keep him in countenance, 'cause why, the hurdy-gurdy foreign chaps would be down on him in less than no time." He said this ruefully, because he rather liked the idea of exhibiting a monkey and gathering up the pence.

Mrs. Limber, Merryman's genteel landlady, began to think her lodger had taken to evil ways; what else could keep him till near midnight, week in and week out, wet or dry?

He had lost his appetite, too, looked wretched when he came down to breakfast, and never by any chance asked for supper.

He had ceased to partake of her genteel Sunday repast, also, and altogether, except that he paid his weekly bill with his usual regularity, had become a most unsocial and unsatisfactory inmate of her genteel home.

He never once mentioned the cause of his altered demeanour to that genteel personage, doubtless considering her too accomplished and genteel to care for such poor outcasts as Freda and her mother.

I am not quite sure that he would not have embraced the monkey and barrel-organ proposition, only for the dread he entertained of meeting some member of the genteel Limber household during his peregrinations.

Had the mother of Freda been an acknowledged wife and the widow of an honest man, however poor, Merryman would have held his head high and inquired after her with more openness and confidence. It was the cloud under which Alice pined that made the old man, with his innate refinement of character, shrink from mentioning her name to any one he knew, except Mrs. Trimble and her son.

He could not but share that good woman's opinion concerning the marriage ceremony Alice had gone through with the unfortunate earl, because he knew that Lord Chineron had left a widow and a son, as the newspapers put it, to mourn his loss.

Alice had been deceived and betrayed; a woman far more to be pitied than blamed, yet a woman, nevertheless, that genteel females like Mrs. Limber wouldn't care to associate with.

The pocket-book was sealed securely, or perhaps Merryman

might have been tempted to pry into its contents, although he did not expect to find anything in it more than a pecuniary provision for Freda and possibly for her mother also.

Anyhow, it would be his care to see that neither wanted for anything, once he was fortunate enough to find them, so he often told himself, and worked very hard at engrossing, that he might lay by a little fund for this particular purpose.

As a rule he worked from nine till four, allowing himself an hour for dinner, but it sometimes happened that he followed up some imaginary trail during his dinner hour, and did not return until late in the afternoon.

It was his custom to put a written notice on his office door, when he went to his dinner, informing any one it might concern to know that he was gone out and would return shortly.

One day, a woman closely veiled crept noiselessly up the dark stair and read this notice on the door. It was not her intention, however, either to depart or await his return outside on the landing, as she at once inserted a key in the lock and opened the door without the least hesitation.

In another instant she was standing alone in the dingy outer office belonging to Alex Cameron's set of chambers. She was trembling visibly, and her breath came thick and fast as she cast an uneasy, frightened look around her.

Then she proceeded straight towards the door that led to the inner room, unlocked it with nervous haste, then took out the key, locked the door on the inside, and throwing something over the keyhole to keep out prying eyes, gave a deep sigh of relief, although the place was in semi-darkness and smelt like a vault.

The shutters were closed but not fastened. She opened them a little way and peeped out cautiously, to see if there was any chance of opening the windows without being observed from the outside.

She might venture to open one of the windows a few inches. The air was suffocating. She began to feel faint.

Like a midnight robber, she noiselessly unbarred the window and lifted the sash.

No one was about, the place outside appeared quite deserted; seeing this she gained courage and threw the window wide open.

The fresh air revived her; the thought, too, that she had not a moment to lose urged her on to immediate action.

First, however, she shut down the window to within a few inches and closed the shutters in such a way that light enough fell through to enable her to see what she was about, although a person from the outside would fail to observe that shutters and window were not closed as usual.

Then she looked about her with an eager, inquiring gaze.

Where should she begin her search? An iron safe first attracted her attention. Where would she be more likely to find what she came in quest of than in that secure repository.

With beating heart and trembling hands she stooped down and applied a key to the massive lock; the door flew open with a click that made her start back and utter a faint shriek of terror.

It was evident that her nerves were strung to tension; every sound made her start and tremble.

With nervous haste, yet with a sort of methodical order in all her movements, she began to examine the papers one by one, replacing them, too, in regular order, so that she caused no litter or confusion as she proceeded in her search.

At length she folded up the last paper the safe contained with a sigh; the document she wanted was not there.

After locking the door of the iron safe, she rose up and looked about her once more. She was evidently at a loss where to begin after her fruitless search in the strong iron safe.

There were a few old-fashioned cupboards in the room, built into the wall. None of these were locked, yet they were mostly crammed with bundles of legal documents, covered thick with dust.

These she surveyed with a blank look; to go over such a pile of papers one by one would prove a task beyond her powers of endurance.

She thought, also, that there could be but the barest chance of finding what she sought amid that dusty pile. The writing-table would prove a far more likely repository for such an all-important document.

With this consideration she sat down, and began with cool deliberation to unlock the writing-table drawers and examine their contents.

In one secret drawer she found a bundle of letters, carefully tied up with black ribbon sealed with black wax; the packet

was subscribed, "To be delivered by my executor into the hands of Lady Maud Chineron."

The lady turned this packet over in her hand reflectively; then, with a slight red spot appearing on her pale cheeks as though her proud blood rebelled at the base act, she secured them about her own person. There was such a number of drawers well packed with letters and papers that it took some time to examine the contents, and before she had quite finished she heard the outer office door open and some one enter.

The blood thrilled through every vein as she heard a man's heavy tread approach the door of the room in which she sat.

What if he entered and found her rifling the drawers of Alex Cameron's writing-table?

She held her breath to listen.

He was walking to and fro, and, more than once, deep-drawn sighs fell on her listening ear.

At length the footsteps ceased and a silence that could be felt reigned once more.

But alas! she was a prisoner, and must remain in that dreary place until the man, whoever it might be, left the office, as her only means of exit lay through that room.

She had expected to find what she sought during the clerk's dinner hour, but her search had been so far prolonged that the hour had slipped by, and now, doubtless, he would remain until his afternoon's work was done.

It was impossible to sit there idle through two weary hours, so she quietly resumed her search, in no very enviable state of mind, starting and trembling in every limb at the least sound or movement from without.

She did not even rustle the paper as she unfolded one document after another, so cautious was she in her every movement. She was in no hurry, as she thought that two hours, at least, lay before her in the which to finish her search.

At length she had carefully gone through every shelf and drawer, even to the dusty shelves of the unlocked cupboards. Her eyes ached, her hands were black with dust, and yet what she so patiently sought for had not been found.

One key alone remained on the bunch for which she had found no use. She must not overlook any nook or corner, her

search must be thorough: she could never dare venture on such another errand.

As yet she had confined her search to one room; she rather shrank from opening the door that led to an inner chamber, but finding her search vain, she summoned up all her courage and threw open the door. She was not surprised to find herself in a bedroom, rather barely furnished.

What little furniture it contained was covered thick with dust. The place, apparently, had not been entered for some months; the blinds were drawn, but the light was quite strong enough for her to see about her, accustomed as she had been, for the past two hours, to the dim uncertain light that glimmered through the almost closed shutters.

A chest of drawers and an old-fashioned escritoire were the only pieces of furniture at all likely to contain letters or papers of any value.

Without a moment's hesitation she decided to search the escritoire first, but she found it securely locked, and none of the keys she carried fitted into the curious old lock.

This was truly vexatious. She would not have hesitated a moment to break it open, only she dared not make the least noise, with the old clerk within hearing.

Whilst she lingered before it, undecided what to do next, a slight movement behind her made her start and turn hurriedly round towards the door.

There in the dim uncertain light appeared a dark shadowy figure, standing silent, and motionless as the stagnant air that filled the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WOMAN of the strongest nerve would have been overawed at finding herself thus suddenly confronted by such a gruesome apparition in that silent dreary place, which had been, not long since, the scene of such a fearful tragedy.

Even this bold unscrupulous intruder felt a cool sensation of horror creep over her frame as she beheld that dark silent figure standing motionless before her.

She was evidently no weak-minded woman given to superstitious fears, yet, for a moment, she felt as though a spectre had risen from the dead to reproach her; a nameless dread took

possession of her soul. She could not utter a sound had her life depended on the effort. Her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, her feet felt as though rooted to the spot.

It was only for a few moments that she stood thus, rooted and spell-bound with a great unspoken dread, yet it seemed an age of torture.

She dropped her arms and gave a long shivering sigh, when at length the sound of a human voice fell on her ear.

It was such a relief to find that shadowy figure was mortal, and nothing more; although the voice inquired, rather sternly, what her business might be in that private room.

The question was thrice repeated before she quite realized the awkwardness of her present position.

Then she began to collect her thoughts a little, and cast about in her mind for some excuse to account for her intrusion. At best it was a most unpleasant position in which she found herself, and how to get out of the dilemma without some loss of dignity and self-respect she knew not.

At length she drew herself up and looked the old man steadily in the face.

"You are Mr. Cameron's clerk, I presume?" she said in a tone of cool self-possession that surprised Mr. Merryman into momentary admiration of her tact and wonderful presence of mind.

"Yes, my lady, I am his clerk at your service," he answered with a bow, as he advanced farther into the room and stood erect before her.

"Ah, well, you know me—and—and of course you are aware that I am an old friend of Mr. Cameron."

"I have seen your ladyship before—but pray excuse me, I must know your errand here, in this room, and at once," replied the old clerk somewhat peremptorily.

"Oh, I have not any particular errand here, my good man," said she, with a contemptuous elevation of her eyebrows. "As I did not find any one in the office when I came, I merely looked about me to pass the time until your return."

"And locked yourself in for that purpose, no doubt, my lady," answered Merryman with bitter irony.

To this she made no reply, but began to move leisurely towards the door, as if about to leave the room.

The old clerk was so taken aback by her cool effrontery that

he did not move a hand to stay her progress until she reached the outer chamber, then he made a sudden bound and stood close in front of her.

"You do not stir another step, Lady Chineron!" he cried hotly, "until you have told me the reason of your surreptitious visit to my employer's private rooms."

She drew herself up haughtily.

"How dare you assume this tone to me?"

Her voice was cold and stern, but her lips trembled as she asked the question.

"I have merely demanded to know your business here, and until I know it you attempt to leave this room at your peril," said the old clerk doggedly.

"What! You know me, and yet you venture to threaten me with violence? You forget yourself, sir. I am not aware that I have refused to state my business, but certainly I decline to submit to any more rudeness from a paid hireling."

The old clerk drew back, cowed by her cool, resolute attitude.

It began to dawn on his mind that he had been rude and somewhat hasty: what power had he to detain her against her will?

"Of course I cannot compel your ladyship to speak," he replied in an altered tone, "but I think that you must see for yourself that your presence here requires some explanation, but—" and here a sudden thought appeared to strike him, as his eye fell on the spot on which she stood—"but pardon me if, for the moment, I forgot that this place must necessarily possess a most melancholy interest in your eyes. It was in this room that your son died by his own hand—your feet are even now resting on the spot where he fell—it was his life-blood that caused that dark indelible stain close before you."

She cast a shuddering glance at the floor, turning pale as death, then, with a low agonized cry, she gathered her long trailing robe around her and fled.

The old clerk looked quite dazed for the moment at the effect his words produced, and did not put forth the least effort to stay her flight.

One object had occupied his mind so much of late that his perception had become dulled; he was slow to comprehend any new or sudden event, and this surreptitious visit of Lady Chineron

to his employer's chambers struck him, as he said, "all of a heap."

He placed his finger on his lip and began to consider what possible motive could have induced this proud patrician dame to come stealthily prying about the chambers.

He began to make a careful survey of the place; nothing had been disturbed as far as he could see. The drawers were all locked and the great iron safe remained intact. The bookshelves were covered with dust; nevertheless, to make sure, he touched the secret spring at the back and disclosed the iron safe; this he unlocked and found the packet intrusted to his care untouched.

She did not gain much by prying about, he thought. Perhaps he had disturbed her before she had accomplished her object.

But how did she get in? He was certain the door of the inner office was locked when he went out to his dinner. In fact the door had not been unlocked, as far as he knew, for the past month or more.

And he had found her locked in, without any key left in the door.

He had never noticed the keys hanging behind the old shooting jacket; had no idea, indeed, that Alex Cameron had forgotten, at the last moment, to take his office keys with him.

After vainly puzzling his head as to how it was possible for the lady to have gained an entrance during his short absence, he decided to ring for the housekeeper. It was just possible she possessed a master-key to the chambers and had let the intruder in.

Mrs. Trimble, however, was as much surprised as the old clerk himself to know that he had found a lady locked in the chambers on his return after dinner.

"It must be the same lady who called a little while ago to see you about Freda," said she, after getting a full description of the visitor from the old clerk. "She said she would call again, but how she got into the office to day I cannot imagine."

"Did you let her in when she called?" he asked quickly.

Mrs. Trimble was not equal to evading the question, or telling a direct falsehood to screen herself, therefore she reluctantly confessed that at the lady's urgent request she had let her in, but that she did not stay long.

"Did you leave her alone?" was his next question.

"Only for just one minute, whilst I fetched her a glass of water," said Mrs. Trimble quite flustered. "You don't think she came here to rob the office, do you, sir?"

Merryman shook his head with a bewildered air. "Do you know who that lady is?" he asked, by way of answer to her question.

"She didn't give her name, but she struck me as being some grand lady from the first moment I laid eyes on her. She did say, however, that she was a friend of Mr. Cameron, and had come to inquire after Freda at his particular request."

"No doubt she is a friend of his," said the old clerk with an air of mystery, "but that is not the reason she takes such a deep interest in Freda and her mother."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Trimble, catching her breath in her eagerness to know more. "Might that lady be any relation of the poor young lord who——?"

"The name of the lady is Chineron; now you can guess why she takes such an interest in Freda."

"An' to think I told her that you had a fortune left in your hands for that child an' her mother!" cried Mrs. Trimble, quite taken aback.

"Ah, you told her that, did you?" said the old clerk with an air of vexation. "You must have had a long talk with her. Pray what made you take a person into your confidence without even knowing her name?"

"Well, really, I hardly know," answered Mrs. Trimble quite crestfallen; "but you see she had such a way with her, an' seemed to know Mr. Cameron so well, that I was quite thrown off my guard; yet, if she is Lady Chineron, it's quite natural she should want to know all about poor little Freda."

"That's true," answered the clerk reflectively; "but, whatever her motive may be, you are not to let her enter Mr. Cameron's chambers again on any pretence whatever."

After the housekeeper left him alone the old clerk examined the locks carefully. They certainly had not been tampered with; but after a few minutes' intent thought an idea appeared to strike him. Then he locked up everything carefully and went out.

In about half-an-hour he returned, followed by a locksmith and his workman.

When Mr. Merryman left the office later on, he had the satis-

faction of knowing that his employer's chambers were secured from future intrusion by an iron bar and a Chubb lock, of which he carried the key.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RATHER more than a year went by, after Alex Cameron left England, without much apparent change with regard to Baron Mannheim's numerous financial schemes.

He was quite as *débonnaire* and open-handed as of old, and equally well received on 'Change and in society.

Fashionable folk of light and leading still continued to welcome him in their midst, although it's true he no longer found himself the hero of the hour; some other, if not brighter star, had risen on fashion's horizon and some new fad had superseded last season's hobby.

The Rev. Roland Pumpnickel was a great authority at this time; the Duchess of Mervilleuse sat under him, and quoted him, and professed to believe in him. He belonged to the æsthetic school, and held forth on the science of the perception of perfect harmony in art and nature.

Education, he declared, was the only thing to elevate the masses; he would have their life made beautiful by the contemplation of perfection.

It was clearly a feminine mission—who but the high-born, the woman of gentle birth and breeding, could elevate the common herd?

To elevate the masses with harmonious sounds was to open up their perceptions to everything that was grand and beautiful.

No sooner had this idea taken hold in the world of fashion than musical classes, for the elevation and purification of the masses, became the rage.

Lady Dorothy Plantagenet, foremost in all good works, hired a large room in Gravel Lane, where she formed evening classes for teaching harmony and the grammar of music to match-makers, factory girls and washerwomen.

Indeed, it suddenly dawned on the aristocratic intellect that the masses were passionately fond of high-class music; and to provide this class of entertainment, free, for the million, was clearly the crying necessity of the age.

Suitable halls and concert rooms were sought out in low

localities, and a score or more of titled dames volunteered to discourse sweet sounds to the great unwashed.

Limp lords and lackadaisical ladies took infinite pains to decorate the orchestra with choice exotic plants and flowers, gilt chairs, soft carpets and velvet hangings, "a thing of beauty" that would prove a joy to East-enders for many a day.

Lady Clara Vere de Vere elected, herself, to warble "Home, sweet Home," to the dwellers in slums and common lodging-houses; and the Duchess of Mervilleuse executed a sonata on an Erard's grand piano, surrounded by light and flowers, to a gaunt assemblage of hunger and rags.

Certainly it was much nicer to sit far apart, surrounded by flowers and perfume, than to offend one's olfactory nerves by going amongst the evil-smelling tatterdemalion crowd.

One gushing young lady, of uncertain age, however, went yet further; she took her stand at the main entrance of the concert hall, braving the cold draught, until her cheek and nose turned to the hue of sweet violets, holding in her hand a basket of flowers, and presented a choice bouquet to each woman as she entered.

The basket had cost a guinea, and its contents cost far more than would have furnished forth a substantial meal to the motley, half-famished crowd, that had come together to see the swells, without the least idea of elevating their moral condition.

"Light, music and flowers!" cried Lady Clara Vere de Vere gushingly, "is so supremely elevating—the masses adore music!"

"Ah, yes, quite so," broke in the Rev. Roland Pumpnickel; "but if we could only rear a temple of music for the masses, where they could resort to drink in the first principles of true harmony, they would no longer be content with ugliness and squalor; no, believe me, harmony alone can purify and elevate the hewers of wood and drawers of water, and raise them out of the slough of despond in which we find them."

The Duchess of Mervilleuse, who was passionately fond of music, caught at the idea with enthusiasm.

A temple of harmony for the masses must be built forthwith. A committee was formed, with the duchess at their head, for this object; and plans for the building were invited to be sent in from the most eminent architects.

Very soon her town mansion overflowed with plans and papers relative to this grand temple of music for the multitude.

At length a plan was decided on and a site selected, regardless of expense.

There was one drawback, however—money was not so easy to find as the plan and the site.

Lords and ladies admired and approved of it all. They gave their countenance to the affair—nothing more.

Where, then, could the money be found to raise this much-needed temple in all its gorgeousandness and spectacular glory?

Why, in the City, as a matter of course. The merchant princes were known to be as generous as they were rich; men who subscribed their thousands where Lord Pinchbeck put himself down for a guinea.

The Duchess of Mervilleuse decided that Baron Mannheim should be taken into their counsel; she was certain he would head the subscription with a thousand guineas, if she were properly civil to him.

The duchess, however, reckoned this time without her host.

He shrugged his shoulders, when in her most winning manner she laid the plan of the Temple of Harmony before him, and declined not only to head the subscription list, but to subscribe at all.

After that she failed to receive him graciously, becoming unaccountably hard of hearing whenever he ventured to address her.

This might be considered the turning-point in his fashionable career, or his first step on the road to Coventry; as many ladies of distinction followed the lead given by her grace, and not only became deaf to his conversation, but also too near-sighted to see him.

In the City the financial sky had suddenly become overcast with clouds, which lowered ominously over Cowl Court.

Promises unfulfilled, like hope deferred, maketh the heart sick, and relations were becoming strained between the baron and his numerous clients.

Much discontent had been expressed from time to time, in the hearing of the clerks, by the crowd that waited daily in the outer office to gain an interview with the baron.

It was not the clerks' business, however, to listen to the complaints of disappointed clients. In fact they took no heed of

them, and bent over the ponderous ledgers unmoved, making entries as calmly as though they were the only occupants of that business-like edifice.

The first of the baron's financial schemes to yield to the strain was the Grebenski Gold Mining Company.

The shareholders all at once became discontented, even clamorous.

Ugly reports floated about the City, in which the word swindle was frequently heard.

The shares, which had risen, not long since, to ten pounds premium, were now quite unsaleable in the open market.

Some luckless speculator had gone in to "bull" the shares, under the implied advice of the baron, and when settling day arrived bankruptcy stared him in the face.

In an evil hour for the baron this luckless wight rushed into print, and the consequence was that the Grebenski Gold Mining Company exploded and fell like a spent rocket into space.

The baron, however, went on his way apparently unmoved. What was it to him if a company in which he was interested suddenly collapsed? Companies were being wound up every day, and the promoters fared none the worse for it, in the opinion of the world.

True, more than one City magnate on 'Change did begin to look askance at the gigantic financier.

Still, as the baron's credit was good at his bankers' and his paper was duly met, no man, as yet, cut him openly.

It was generally reported that the baron had cleared more than a million by floating joint stock companies and lucky speculations on the Stock Exchange, so that few men cared, in this age of progress, to cut a millionaire because he was known to be, at best, nothing but a clever financial machinator.

Possibly it would not, under present circumstances, have proved an easy matter for him to have floated a new company, but then, as he happened to have so many irons in the fire, he was content for the time to keep the forge going.

About this time, also, the committee of the Universal Colonization Company began to get restive.

Up to a certain point, the members of the committee had been most amiable and blindly trustful.

For more than a year not one dissenting voice had been heard

at the board. They met with hand-shakes and parted with congratulations, after duly pocketing their fees and partaking of a sumptuous luncheon.

The baron was a princely entertainer on such occasions, his wines were fit to be set before crowned heads, and the bill of fare would have tempted a conclave of cardinals in Lent.

But a day came when even sumptuous fare and rare wines failed to mollify the prejudiced members of the committee. After this meeting relations became strained between Baron Mannheim and his *confrères*. Some thought fit to tender their resignation, whilst others, who had something at stake in the concern, set about in right earnest to overhaul the books of the company.

The company's rules and regulations, however, to which they had themselves subscribed, were found to contain so many conditions, wheels within wheels as it were, that they soon found themselves in a hopeless maze, and began to despair of finding any solution of the complex question. The committee found it impossible to agree on any given line of action.

They were powerless to wind up the concern, seeing it was solvent and had various agencies at work in every part of the habitable globe; so chafe as they might, the baron remained master of the situation.

(To be continued.)

Reminiscences of a Visit to India and China.

HOW WE GOT THERE AND HOME AGAIN.

PART III.

ON approaching Hong Kong we steamed past endless mountainous islands; on some of them there was a fair amount of vegetation, which at the time was clothed in the tender verdure of spring. The magnificent harbour seemed all at once to burst upon us as a surprise, alive as it was with shipping of all kinds, including several vessels of the royal navy. Beyond it lay the prettily-shaped island, with "the Peak" and other mountains standing out in fine outline. It is beautifully laid out; numbers of nice villas are scattered about its steep inclines, surrounded by pretty gardens, in which I observed many large pots of the delicious little "Mandarin" orange. The way up to these villas is charmingly wooded and the ground carpeted with ferns and creepers. The quaint town is composed of arcades containing shops of all sorts, a long narrow board hanging outside of each, with the name of the shopkeeper painted on it in Chinese letters. Inside you will always see the occupants busy at work, much pleased if you admire their wares, but never bothering you to buy as the natives of India do; only the "rickshaw" men and the carriers of the sedan-chairs rather plague one to employ them. In one shop we watched a whole family having their meal of tea and rice, eating the latter with chop-sticks. It was such a queer sight, and they appeared quite delighted at being observed, and made us signs of satisfaction. The streets are crowded, everybody seeming very busy, hastening to and fro; in fact apparently as much occupied and with as little time to spare as in the City of London.

The governor and his wife, Sir William and Lady Des Vœux, being both former acquaintances of ours, we at once went to Government House to pay them our respects, when for the first time I experienced being carried in a sedan-chair, which is

the usual mode of conveyance throughout China, although the "jinrickshaw," or "rickshaw," as it is commonly called, being a little two-wheeled carriage drawn by a man, is also sometimes used, but not so universally as the chairs are. These latter can be a very easy, pleasant way of going about, but they can also be much the reverse, for all depends on your "Johnnies," as the British call the Chinese coolies, whether they be chair-carriers, rickshaw boys, servants, or anything else. Some walk smoothly, while others have a sort of high action, which I found caused one great fatigue, and I heard others complain in the same way. Government House is beautifully situated on the edge of the cliff in a lovely garden, with a perfect panorama view of the sea and neighbouring islands, and on a clear day a distant peep of the mainland. Both Sir William and Lady Des Vœux were most kind and invited us to stay with them, but as our visit to the island was to be brief, and part of the time taken up in going to see Canton, we arranged in preference to dine and have luncheon with them whenever we could. They took us out one day in their steam pinnace, when we steamed all round the island and had a good view of its great beauty and of the endless curious Chinese cemeteries, with their quaint-looking graves with pieces of stick fixed at the head of each, on which are inscriptions, those of the rich being in the shape of a horse-shoe and fenced all round.

One day the governor's wife kindly took me for a drive in her victoria, on the only driveable road there is. Her Chinese coachman and footman wore scarlet liveries, but made in the fashion of their own country, consisting of loose tunics with large sleeves, tight trousers, white cotton stockings, Chinese shoes, round black beaver hats with a red button in the centre of the crown and long pigtails. There were besides two outriders of the Sikh police, for a small force of the latter are quartered at Hong Kong to protect the governor and the British inhabitants; for although the Chinese make capital servants and are sometimes faithful, they are not always to be trusted. These Sikhs are splendid-looking men, very tall, with fine figures and handsome faces. Their dress, too, is most becoming, being a tight-fitting red coat, dark blue trowsers and crimson turbans, which were most gracefully draped round their heads. In addition to this force, Chinese police are employed in the native part of the town:

They wear the usual loose blue tunic of the country, with white straw hats much the shape of a basin turned over.

Lady Des Vœux told me that when she first came to the island she had driven without this escort, who were armed and well mounted on Arab steeds from India; but one day, when fortunately her husband was with her, some Chinese, who had just hauled their junk on shore with fish, seeing the carriage, suddenly made for it, as if to attack it, with the view, they thought, of robbing it. Perceiving this, the governor, having been accustomed all his life to half-savage races, very tall man as he was, rose from his seat, stood up in the middle of the victoria and waved his stick above his head in a menacing way towards the advancing fishermen and at the same time he urged his coachman to greater speed. His great figure so unexpectedly rising evidently so startled these natives that they paused, and this allowed time, as the horses had quickened their paces, for the carriage to get swiftly out of reach of pursuit. On his return he mentioned the incident to some of the oldest British officials; the latter then told him that previously all governors had taken an escort of two and even four of these Sikhs when driving, and they strongly advised that this should be done in future. To set against this, his Excellency told me that the Chinese population in Hong Kong, once they have experienced British rule, grow extremely loyal; in fact, the native ingress to the island had had to be rather stopped for fear of its becoming over-populated, as hearing of the advantages their fellow-countrymen had gained from living there, had made many more desirous to become subjects of the Queen of England. Actually 80,000 dollars had been spent in celebrating her Majesty's Jubilee in 1887, the Chinese contributing the larger portion of this sum.

Just before our arrival the jubilee of the island had been celebrated. It seemed most wonderful that it was but fifty years since it had been but a barren rock like many of the islands near, more especially when one went about and saw the many fine buildings and in the suburbs the numbers of beautiful villas; while the streets in the native part of the town consisted of endless shops and were thronged with thousands of men, women and children, all apparently most flourishing.

Chinamen are certainly very funny; the man who waited on me in the hotel was called "Yaa-ou." He told me, "If ring bell

five times, Yaa-ou come and do best for you." He and all the "Johnnies" always said to me, "Yees, saa," as if I was sir! A shopkeeper addressed a letter to me: "No. 2, house up," meaning my room was on the second floor. Much of the "pid-jin" English, as their jargon is termed, was quite incomprehensible to me. I was told that they call a steamer "two piecey bamboo, one piecey puff-puff, walking inside, no can see," if a screw-steamer with one funnel, and "two piecey puff-puff, walking outside, can see," if there are two funnels and paddle-boxes.

I further heard that although Chinamen hold women in contempt, with the usual Oriental idea, as very inferior to men, they all have the greatest respect for their mothers, who hold a great sway over their sons and select who they should marry; but when married the poor daughter-in-law becomes a perfect slave to her mother-in-law; I believe this is rather the case in Japan, too. If dishonour or insult is intended to any one, the pigtail is tied up round the head: in fact, if a Chinaman appears before the foreigner with no pigtail showing, the latter should feel affronted; and British residents assured me that if it should so happen that they were to eat a meal or have to hold any intercourse with a "celestial" and his pigtail was not to be seen, they would be obliged to remonstrate with him and if possible complain of him to one of his own countrymen in a higher or an official position, who would at once reprimand the offender.

On a pouring wet morning quite early we started for Canton in one of the river steamers plying between there and Hong Kong, embarking passengers and crew, all told, to the number of 1,075, over 1,000 being Chinese, including both stewards and crew, the captain, officers and engineers being British or American. Fortunately after two hours it cleared, enabling us to see the pretty shores of the river to great advantage after the refreshing rain; here and there they were wooded, with views of mountains beyond; in parts they were planted with bananas and those delicious fruits, mangoustines and litchiee, the latter being indigenous of China. After some hours, signs that we were approaching the city showed themselves by the increasing number of craft of all sorts, even to a Chinese torpedo boat, followed very soon by our coming in sight of the great feature of Canton, the perfect forest

of house-boats of every kind and size, crammed with men, women and children; in fact there is a dense population on the river. There are huge theatre house-boats, dancing house-boats; indeed every kind of occupation and amusement conceivable was going on in these boats, which were all quite filthy, making it truly a painful as well as wonderful sight and a great contrast to further up, where the European quarter is established by the waterside, with its neat detached houses and well laid out "Bund," as the Esplanade is termed in the East. The foreign residents are about 100 in number.

Our first step on arrival was to secure a good guide recommended by the captain of our ship. He introduced to us a clean, rather smart-looking Chinaman, who had a great swagger and a lordly mien, as much as to say: "I am indeed one of the Celestial Empire!" He was dressed in the inevitable blue, but of fine silk material, not the ordinary blue cotton the coolies and common people wear; he had on the usual round hat with red button in the middle of the crown and a splendid pigtail; he smoked cigarettes incessantly the whole time he was with us, making his remarks with great condescension of manner between his puffs, but talking remarkably good English. He took me particularly under his protection in the most patronizing way, calling me "missy" and insisting on my taking his arm whenever on foot, to the intense amusement of all with me.

He conducted us on shore, amidst hordes of the dirtiest of the inhabitants, put us into closed chairs, each carried by three men. We next proceeded from the quay, our guide, in his chair, leading the way to the gate of the city, which had a very ancient appearance, the walls rising up each side from it and completely encircling the whole town. We saw one man, outside the city gate, undergoing the punishment of the stocks, in which his hands and feet were fixed, while he had a spiked collar round his neck; he was guarded by the Imperial police and soldiers, or "braves," as the latter are called in China, who were sitting, lounging on their haunches, looking more like beggars than anything else, in ragged loose smocks, which had large hieroglyphics painted on them in red and yellow. Our guide told us they were Tartars, as the Emperor could not trust the Cantonese "braves" in their native town, so they are sent elsewhere; these Tartars are not armed,

as it would not be safe to trust them with weapons, for they might misuse them.*

We first visited the "Five Hundred Buddha Temple," containing five hundred life-size gilt idols of Buddha ; it was explained to us that the reason there are so many is that each represents this prophet in different forms and that he can be all things to all men, and that part of the idols were for the Chinese and the rest for other countries—Indians, Malays, Singalese, &c. Before some of these images "jos-sticks" were burning, being pieces of scented bamboo, smouldering in ashes, placed there by some one who had made a special petition for what this idol was supposed to represent as being able to grant. When speaking English, they call their temples "jos-houses" and their priests "jos-men." I enjoyed much inspecting a silk factory, where we saw the finest materials, of the most delicate hues, being woven ; it was rather refreshing going there on leaving the "City of the Dead." The latter is so called because it consists of a whole street of houses filled with coffins, for it is the custom of the richer Chinese to hire rooms here and to place their dead in them, before interring them ; if they can afford it they take a suite of rooms, a sitting-room and a bedroom, all well furnished, and keep their relatives' remains, if possible, for a whole year, and have their clothes and meals prepared for them daily as if they were alive. Only the wealthy can keep them long, for enormous sums have to be paid for these apartments.

We went to several other temples of lesser interest and to a very high pagoda, which was elaborately carved and very like those one often sees pictures of ; finally, we explored the famous Five-storied Pagoda, from the top of which we had a splendid view of the old city walls, also the European station in the distance, with the beautiful French Roman Catholic Cathedral and its taper spire, which was built more than a century ago. I wished the English Cathedral at Hong Kong had been as fine. We, further, had a full view of the extraordinary scenes we had just been going through ; of the endless filthy streets, so narrow that you could shake hands across from the windows of the very high-storied houses on each side, and of the inter-

* All the Chinese soldiery I saw were of the same description, looking more like beggars and dressed in rags ; no wonder that the Japanese have so easily defeated them during the past months.

minable shops, from those with well-carved furniture, ivory, porcelain, silks and the most costly of wares, to innumerable dirty eating shops, of such an awful description as I hardly like to relate. In addition, barbers were continually to be seen at their doors, shaving men's heads and faces, extracting their eyebrows and eyelashes and brushing out their pigtails, while everywhere the smells were so foul that I was thankful I had a salts bottle with me.

The whole way teemed with thousands upon thousands of men, women and children, all hideous, yelling and screaming at each other, often poking their faces into my chair and shrieking at me, what I believe it was well, I could not understand, for they hate all foreigners, but chiefly the women, and generally curse them as they pass. I felt relieved my "chair" was closed, all but the window, more especially when, shortly after we had started, it knocked over a boy and all the goods he was hawking in the street; my "Johnnies" never stopped, but hurried on through the crowd so quickly that it could not be discovered who had caused the accident. It was a good thing for me they did, for I felt as if my last moment had come when I saw the angry faces round me and heard their discordant voices howling at me, knowing well that, a foreign woman's sedan-chair having caused the catastrophe, I should have been shown no mercy, and we were four unarmed Europeans against this mass of half savages. Not many young women were to be seen about, for the men do not like their wives to go out much, but numbers of old women, some with feet, I am sure, not more than two inches long, besides scores of children and poor little babies tied up in the barbarous fashion of the country. I was told that the Cantonese being so much a water population, the women's feet are not crushed up to the same extent as in many places.

To return to the Five-storied Pagoda. It is at the extreme edge of the city; it had formerly been used as a temple and contains the most grotesque carved figures, but it now serves as a watch tower, for it stands very high, besides being a lofty building, so that from the roof the country round can be most extensively surveyed. The guardian of the pagoda supplied us with tea in cups with tops to them, according to the habit of the land; he first placed the tea-leaves at the bottom of the cup, then poured enough hot water over them for one cup, replacing

the top, left it thus to stand for two minutes and then poured the tea into another cup, also with a top to it, from which one sipped at the edge, holding the cover on as you drank: if you required a second cup, more hot water was poured over the leaves, and after standing the tea is again put into the other cup to drink from.

By this time, being past 6 p.m., at which hour the city gates are closed, we had to return to our ship through the European quarter, and from the Bund we got into a "sanpan" with a whole Chinese family living on it, the husband rowing while the wife steered us back to our steamer, just in time for dinner. We had arranged to sleep on board, for we knew how much more comfortable we should be in our good clean cabins, with a regular bedstead, armchairs, sofa and tables in them, than in a very doubtful hotel. After dinner I amused myself watching the crew playing dominoes and cards, which latter were rather long and about one inch wide. Before sailing on our return journey the next morning, we had just time to go on shore to do a little shopping, when the bargaining was most amusing; our guide of the previous day went with us, accompanying us back to the ship, where he took quite a tender farewell of us all, making many ridiculous, would-be complimentary speeches, still puffing cigarettes all the time. I could not help thinking how strange it was that all this vast company of people should be perfectly hideous, the perpetual ugly blue usually worn making them still more unpleasing to the eye and such a contrast to the graceful, good-looking natives of India in their picturesque colours. The upper and middle classes, though, often wear rich greens and browns mixed with yellow, of the choicest materials, which make a fairly good effect.

On reaching Hong Kong the weather was so fine and the atmosphere so clear we determined at once to go up to the "Peak" by the funicular railway, and we were well rewarded, for the view was superb; we could see for miles and miles all round. I was glad to put on an extra wrap, for it felt somewhat fresh at that height. We found the island, on arriving—the middle of April—pleasantly cool after the places we had lately been in, and I was told it seldom became really sultry much before June. There are a large number of well-situated villas on the mountain, for many of the residents spend the summer there, and if the men

have to work below during the day, they run up by train in the evening to sleep on the "Peak."

Before sailing the next day we went to look at the race-course, and were surprised to find such a good one; it is so remarkable, it matters not in what part of the world "John Bull" settles down, he has not been there long before a race-course is established and golf-links. We had a very chilly and unpleasant voyage from Hong Kong; I had been warned that it was always tempestuous on these seas and bitterly cold, and I found the warning truly verified. Our ship was one of the French Messagerie Company's; the food was excellent, quite dainty for sea fare, but both saloons and cabins were uncomfortable, and I was not sorry after two days and two nights to land at Shanghai, though in pouring rain; this rain continued the whole of the next day, which happened to be Sunday, so I took a "rickshaw" and drove to the Cathedral, where I found not more than half-a-dozen people, owing to the inclemency of the weather; this was the sixth English cathedral I had come upon in my extensive travels.

On Monday it cleared, so on receiving a very civil invitation from the stewards of the course to attend the races, which were to take place that day, we went and saw the "Shanghai Derby" run! The course is a very good one, with a capital stand, and has a fair-sized grass lawn in front of it to walk about on. There are no paddocks, but we inspected several of the ponies in their stables near. The jockeys are not professionals, for the owners or a friend ride these ponies, which are all natives of China; the riders are well turned out and looked most sporting in their respective colours. An excellent luncheon was provided behind the stand, to which we were kindly invited.

The drive to the course was most entertaining; we passed through several bazaars and curious-looking streets, all gaily decorated with flags and flowers, for the day of the races is quite as much a gala day with the natives as with the foreign residents. We saw carriages upon carriages of the upper class Chinese all wending their way there, besides many on foot. Some of these vehicles were most gorgeous; they were chiefly victorias, the panels being beautifully coloured; one was painted all gold, and little mirrors were fixed the whole way round it, while the harness was glittering with gilt and was gay with ribbons and flowers.

The inmates, especially the women, were gaudily arrayed in the richest silks and satins, their hair being most elaborately done up according to the fashion of their country, and adorned with large combs and wax flowers, while on their necks, which were bare, owing to their collars being low, they had placed pearl necklaces besides other costly jewels. Their faces were deeply enamelled, their cheeks and lips were brilliantly rouged and they wore nothing on their heads, but used fans for a protection from the sun; they really did very much resemble the figures and faces one often sees depicted on fire-screens.

As soon as the races were over, being still early we took a drive in the country round, which was flat and uninteresting, only I enjoyed the fresh green everywhere, after the parched look of the tropical lands we had so lately left. We found Shanghai very cold and were glad of fires, although it was the end of April. The European part of the town is decidedly fine, with good public buildings and well laid-out public gardens along the Bund. It is a remarkable place, considering it is purely cosmopolitan, consisting of French, British and Germans, the first-named being the original settlers, having come there from the old French colony in Cochin China. It is under the Chinese Imperial Government, who allow three jurisdictions, namely, a French, a British and a Chinese one. I was told the "Celestials" often take their cases to the British court, thinking they get more justice dealt to them in it than in their own. At the time, an amusing anecdote was going about, of a Chinaman suing for a divorce from his wife. When asked why he wished to part with her, he replied: "Because she too muchee talkee, she too muchee snoree, she too muchee dink European blandy and she too muchee no good at all!" Chinatown, as the native quarter is always called, is very similar to Canton, and I heard that throughout the country the towns all resemble each other.

The next day I visited the French Institute, kept by a sisterhood for the education of girls of all nations, a great boon to parents, who can there obtain really good instruction for their children irrespective of their religion. One of the sisters is English, another is German and the rest with the mother superior are French; thus all these languages are taught. Among the scholars were a few boarders who paid, others being motherless, and the fathers glad to find such a good home for

them to be brought up in ; there were also a great many day pupils, while an orphanage is attached to the same building, which is free of all charges, where nearly all are boarders, many of whom are half-caste Chinese, negresses, foundlings, &c. ; with touching stories relating to them. They were of all ages, from babies up to eighteen, and seemed both happy and well cared for. The superior was a dear old lady, apparently adored by all, but particularly by the poor little orphans, whom she treated quite as her own children. She told me she had come out from France twenty-three years ago and had only been home once since ; she further told me much that was most interesting concerning the Roman Catholic mission work in China, which dated back from the sixteenth century, and that there were now numbers of Christian Chinese, some of whom were sisters-of-mercy, who had descended from ancestors who had been martyred at that distant period for embracing Christianity. She took me into their small cathedral, which adjoins the institute and is very beautiful. Owing to this strong French element, the natives often mix expressions from this language with their "pidgin" English ; for instance, they sometimes say "No savey," for, "I don't know."

That evening we embarked on board of a big steamer, with the view of going up the Yang-ste-Kiang river to Hankow, which is from six to seven hundred miles in the interior. This river is the second longest in the world, being four thousand miles in length ; at one part it is six miles in width, so that you could not see both banks at once. A portion of the latter were so green and pretty with views of distant mountains beyond, of woods clothed in the fresh garb of spring and fruit trees in blossom ; while other parts were quite wild with copse-wood, and reminded me of Scotland, especially on going by a curious big rock in the middle of the river, which recalled the Bass Rock on the east coast. We continually passed various-shaped pagodas, temples, and here and there strong fortifications, also Chinese ships of all sorts, including men-of-war, generally British built, each with their "eye,"—our own vessel having one too—painted on the bows, as Chinamen say otherwise they could not see ! We saw some enormous rafts, which were so huge they were almost like a village ; several families were living on them besides pigs and chickens. We stopped at each port, and I really

think the taking on and the putting off at all these ports was even a more curious sight than when coasting off Southern India. At one of them two mandarins with their "braves" (soldiers) came on board, the latter being dressed in much the same way as those at Canton. We touched at Nankin and Kiukiang. Both these places are famous for their manufacture of porcelain; at the latter I purchased some. Our captain, officers and engineers were all British or American, while both crew and stewards were Chinese, and all the first-class passengers were English "charsees," as the tea merchants are called.

Hankow is a very small settlement; it was ceded to Great Britain by China after the war in 1863, to enable the British to carry on the tea trade, but now there are as many, if not more, Russians settled there, for their nation drink Chinese tea in preference to all other, whereas but a small quantity in comparison is sent to the English market. We were first taken round the foreign quarter; it has a very fine Bund and the well-built villas of the residents each had nice gardens round them, in which were masses of China roses in full bloom. On the race-course there was a good stand, and a golf-link close by.

Afterwards we visited St. Joseph's Institute, which is under an Italian sisterhood; it had been started more than twenty-five years ago. It is solely for Chinese; they keep there numbers of decrepit old women, some totally blind, who, because they can no longer work and make money, their families have turned out, for they are a terribly cruel and heartless race. There are seven hundred babies and children in the house, some of which are orphans, while the mothers of many work within the building, for it is entirely self-supporting. We saw work of all kinds being done, especially Chinese clothing of every description, from the finest embroidery in silks to the commonest and coarsest materials used. They were knitting, weaving, sewing, making cotton-wool to line coats or quilts, shoes, caps and hats, the old women being busily employed at separating the good parts of the wool from the bad. The girls are all kept until they are eighteen or nineteen, when they are generally married to those of their countrymen who are Christians; the wedding of one of the girls had taken place that morning in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Several of the sisters of mercy were Chinese; those who were not, as well as the reverend mother,

were Italians. The latter was such a nice woman, but could only speak "pidgin" English besides her own tongue. She said when they had first started, they tried to do away with the strapping up of the girls' feet, but found it would not answer, for in after life they suffered so much in consequence, as it prevented their marrying, and they themselves would implore, though it hurt them dreadfully, to have their feet tied up in the barbarous fashion of their country, so now they always do it. It appears in some districts this reducing of the feet is not so essential as in others, but round Hankow it is of much importance. The superior told me the summers there are very hot, but the winters are often extremely severe.

In connection with the sisterhood, and adjoining the institute, there is a hospital for both men and women, which is daily and carefully attended by an English resident doctor. A little tale was related to me concerning it, about a girl who had been brought up at St. Joseph's, and who became afterwards a servant in the household of the viceroy of that province. Her master accidentally burnt his arm very seriously while she was in his service; she was so distressed at this that she implored his immediate attendants to persuade him to go to the hospital and get the good sisters to dress it. For some time he refused to do so, but at length he was induced to go, and his arm healed so rapidly, owing to the good care of the sisters, that he had a large board made, and painted on it in Chinese characters the wonders worked in the institution, including the cure of his own arm, and telling all passers-by to show reverence to the sisters. He then sent the board by his "braves," accompanied by a band of music and preceded by a herald, to be fastened up over the door, where it still remains. It struck me as rather curious to see all representations in the chapel of Our Lord and of the Madonna in Chinese clothes, instead of the usual Jewish garments that we are accustomed to see. I was informed, when remarking on this, that unless these representations are thus depicted they do not appeal to the Chinese mind.

One of the tea merchants invited us to go over his factory, which was a very big one, where we saw tea being prepared for exportation in large thick bricks, looking like a huge chocolate cake, for the peasants in Russia and Siberia, besides the finest quality being prepared for the upper classes in Russia. All the

labour was entirely done by the hand, or I should more correctly say by the feet, for the crushing of the leaves and rolling them out was being done by the feet. The coolies employed have to be very civilly treated by the Europeans over them, or they stop work at once, and woe betide what they might not do to their employers.

We had made great friends with one of the European officials to the Imperial government, so he kindly conducted us in his own private chairs through China-town, which was much the same as those already mentioned, only it had been so seldom visited by a foreign woman I proved a great curiosity to the inhabitants, who stared at me as if I was a wild beast ; one little girl of the upper classes making her attendant place her on his shoulder, to get a better view of me. The roofs of some of the temples were covered with Dunmore tiles, which made a very good effect. All plays are acted in the temples, and I regretted I had no opportunity of attending one. After climbing a steep hill, from which we had a splendid view, we came to "No. one jos-house," as the principal temple is called ; "No. one jos-man" (the chief priest) inviting us into his little room, which was very dirty and smelt horribly ; he insisted on giving us tea, and he let off fireworks in honour of a visit from foreigners.

Our friend in the Imperial service had suggested our endeavouring to get an introduction to the viceroy, that we might thereby see the interior of his palace and get a peep of life among the better classes, but the British consul would not sanction it, as he said the people on the opposite shores of the river, where the governor resided, were so unfriendly to strangers it would not be safe, and that, though his "braves" would be sent to escort us, it was well known they were not to be relied on, and certainly, when only rowing under the banks, the inhabitants scowled and shouted at us. We were therefore taken instead to see a gun-boat of the Imperial navy, which lay at anchor a little way off, being kept there for the viceroy's use whenever he needed it. We were rowed to it in one of the boats belonging to the Imperial service, the boatmen wearing picturesque liveries of white and blue, and the white standard with the five-clawed dragon flying at our helm. The captain and officers all received us most cordially, standing in a row, dressed in their national costumes, which look like dressing-gowns of brown satin ;

they wore skull-caps and pigtails and had fans in their hands. Fortunately the governor's secretary, the only good-looking Chinaman I have seen, was calling on them at the time, for he spoke English fluently and acted as interpreter, having been educated at the University at Edinburgh, where he was named Hong-Ben-dor, while the British at Hankow called him Mr. Koo. He was evidently unusually intelligent, and belonged to the advanced party in China, who are eager for the opening up of the country ; he told us, with decided satisfaction, that the grant had just been received from Peking for a railway from that part of the river where the larger navigation had to cease, right up to the capital. Many of the English had already pointed out to us the great advancement that had lately been made by the Chinese towards more development in civilization, and how they had also begun to imitate some of the modern improvements which had been made by the Europeans. Curiously enough, only shortly after we left did we hear that after all the advanced party had moved too rapidly, for riots broke out all along the valley of the Yang-ste, which, though reported to be caused by the missionaries setting up the backs of the people, were really owing to the project of making a railway to Peking, the natives considering this opening up of the country would be the letting in of the foreigner, for whom they have ever had from time immemorial such an implacable hatred. At one port the British Consulate was attacked and looted, the consul and his wife escaping for their lives in the disguise of Chinese clothes, the viceroy being obliged to go and quell the riot in the gun-boat that we had been on, all navigation on the river being stopped until the British fleet arrived to protect vessels. In consequence the said railway had to be abandoned.

The captain took us all over his ship, which had been built at Glasgow and was manned with Lord Armstrong's guns ; the crew were all Chinese, like the officers, but the engineers were Europeans. The saloon was beautifully fitted up with panels inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the sofas being covered with exquisitely embroidered satin. The officers regaled us with tea, served in delicate porcelain cups with tops to them, from which we had to sip the tea, holding on the covers all the time ; I feared much lest every minute I should let this fragile china drop. Mr. Koo told us that Hankow and its neighbourhood was the most important

commercial centre of the empire and the most ancient and interesting port classically to his fellow-countrymen. He was full of the Czarewitch's* visit there, which had just taken place before our arrival. He remarked that he supposed this tour that H. I. H. was making in the East was to remind China that there was such an empire as Russia, for as far as his travels educating him, that he was so surrounded by his attendants he had not been allowed to see or to learn much for himself. He said a command had come from Pekin to the viceroy to entertain the prince, so that a great banquet had been given ; but although the orders were for French, as the diplomatic language, to be spoken, Prince George of Greece, who was accompanying his cousin in his travels, at once began to talk English, the Czarewitch doing the same, and in consequence the whole company followed suit ; thus at a Chinese complimentary dinner to a Russian prince the language spoken was English. On leaving, Mr. Koo and the captain both presented us with their visiting cards, which consisted of large pieces of scarlet paper with their names on them in Chinese characters.

The following day we left Hankow ; the captain of our steamer gave me on our voyage down river an account of an awful fire on his former ship. It was believed that some of the Chinese passengers had wickedly set fire to the vessel, in order during the panic to rob their fellow-travellers. He said but for their brutality, as they were not far from land, all lives might have been saved ; but actually the men seized the women, tore from them their earrings or whatever jewels they might have on, and then held them under the water to drown. It is not surprising they have no feeling but animosity towards the foreigner, considering they could act thus to their own countrymen.

On our return we stayed but one night at Shanghai, and then embarked by the Japan mail for that lovely country of the Rising Sun. It was a beautiful spring morning, and at the mouth of the river we passed the whole Chinese fleet, drawn up in line, waiting to be reviewed by the viceroy, who had come down river for that purpose. Presently his gun-boat hove in sight, with the large imperial standard of the gold dragon on a white ground flying from her stern, while smaller bunting of

* Now the Czar Nicholas II.

every shade and hue up to her mast-head fluttered in the breeze. Instantly the Chinese sailors, in their scarlet uniforms and pig-tails too, manned their yards on each of the men-of-war, while the latter let off a salute of twenty-one guns from their broadsides, which were promptly answered by the viceroy's ship, as she rapidly steamed down the lines, causing a deafening sound, and the whole scene forming a magnificent spectacle.

In my next narrative I shall hope to relate our adventures in Japan, as well as on our homeward journey across the Pacific and through America.

L. A. L.

In an Italian Garden.

A STORY.

By "SPAIN,"

Author of "A FRENCH EPISODE," etc., etc.

"It is certainly a most extraordinary state of things," Mr. Jack Mowbray was saying to himself, as he made himself as comfortable as circumstances permitted in the Italian express bound for Naples, which was whirling him northwards, "most extraordinary!" And so in truth it was.

He had been spending a few weeks with an old friend in Southern Italy, a Captain Charles Upton, who had inherited lately a small estate there. His father had bought it early in the fifties, and had turned the rambling old palace which stood in the middle of it into a comfortable dwelling-house suited to English requirements, without interfering unduly with its fine outlines. His wife detested Italian life, but rather than be separated from the husband to whom she was warmly attached for even a few months of the year, she had resolutely hidden her dislike from him and had now come to regard it as her home, since so many happy memories clung about it. She was a charming woman, about fifty-five years of age, and quite crippled by rheumatism; her son had left the army on his father's death, and the two had settled down together in this lovely spot for some nine months every year contentedly enough.

Captain Upton was, as his friends said, rather a "peculiar" man. He was reserved and silent, but those who knew him well were aware that a very tender heart was hidden under the hard outer shell which most people found it so difficult to penetrate. Jack Mowbray was one of the few who had the key to the citadel; the two men were about the same age, some thirty-five years.

Santa Croce—though that, for obvious reasons, is not its real name—is indeed a most beautiful place. Probably it is not unfamiliar to some of my readers, for in old Mr. Upton's time a visitors' book was kept, in which the tourists who visited the

historic little town on the seashore below were permitted to inscribe their names, and were shown over the fairy garden, with its deep fish-ponds and its wealth of flowers, as well as over certain parts of the strange old building not in actual use by the family, if they so desired it. But as the village—half at least of which belongs to its English landlord—is perched high up on the mountain-side, and is only reached by a long climb of some three hours or so, not a great many of these transient globe-trotters ever rang the great bell at the outer gate, though those who did so sometimes bore world-known names. When the present owner came into the property, he caused a notice to be placed in Donna Teresa's great dining-hall in the much-frequented inn of the town below, stating that only personal friends could be admitted to an inspection of the house and grounds. The very day of his arrival there he had come upon a personally-conducted party contentedly wandering in and out among the flower beds, after picnicing close to his study window, and this was exactly the kind of thing which a man of his temperament would find unendurable. They had no idea the house was inhabited, they had replied when remonstrated with, and indeed as he had come there unexpectedly a week before the day he had appointed, they were not so very much to blame after all. The chief sinner was the guardian of the outer gate, Tonino, who had supposed the captain to be in the vineyard and safely disposed of for the morning; when the eager tourists offered him several dirty paper *lire* he thought he would be tempting Providence if he did not avail himself of the chance put in his way. If the captain was not to be found, how could his permission be asked?

"That is all very well, Tonino," his master had answered when these and many more excuses had been volubly offered. "But remember it is not to occur again. I will raise your wages a little, and you must be content with that, or take yourself off altogether."

There was plenty of occupation in the wild, lonely spot where the English household had chosen to locate themselves. The soil was extremely productive and the people very poor; it was therefore manifestly the duty of the owner to develop his resources and benefit his humble neighbours, and the task was congenial to him. The last ten years of his life had been passed in hot climates; the brilliant Italian winter sunshine and the

invigorating air of the sea beneath and the hills above suited him exactly. In summer he would go yachting, or accompany his mother to England, returning to Santa Croce in time for the vintage, for he was justly proud of the wine which the estate produced, as well as of the lemons and oranges which grew so luxuriantly on the warm slopes. The odd part of it was that they did not seem to care to fill the house with guests, as Jack Mowbray himself would have done.

There was, however, now another inmate in the household, of a totally different type, and it was her presence there which had given rise to the thought in the mind of the aforesaid gentleman with the utterance of which my story opens. Jack was given to talk to himself a good deal, and that is how we come to know how he regarded the matter. This inmate, Miss Milly Caruthers, was a girl of two-and-twenty, the orphan daughter of a cousin of Mrs. Upton, who had been brought up in a country house in a remote Scotch village by her guardian, an old gentleman highly respected by those about him, but otherwise totally unfit for the charge which had been imposed upon him. Fortunately he had been aware of his own shortcomings and had done his best to supply the deficiency by handing over his ward to the care of a kindly, motherly lady whom he engaged to come and live under his roof, at a salary large enough to have tempted her to remain there, even if she had not at once conceived a strong affection for her pupil. Then the uncle himself had departed this life, and his deputy, Mrs. Marsden, had declared her intention of ending her days among her own people. Mrs. Upton had been applied to respecting Milly's future arrangements; she had replied by inviting the girl to pay her a long visit.

It should also be mentioned that though Milly had led a very lonely life, one playfellow, Mrs. Marsden's only son, Willie, had been permitted to share her leisure hours for a few days now and then during his holidays, but as this young gentleman seemed to grow up much faster than was at all necessary, Milly's guardian had suggested, a year or two before his death, that it might be as well that these visits should cease, and she had not seen her old playfellow for several years before her arrival at Santa Croce. She was herself a sweet-looking girl, with a complexion that bespoke perfect health, and a round and charming little figure; but

she had something of the same nature as her second cousin, Captain Upton—she was intensely reticent and chary of speech.

"She is good and true," Jack Mowbray decided, after he had been a week or two in the house. "There is a great deal more in that girl than appears on the surface; if she were my wife I should trust her entirely, and you cannot say that of too many women now-a-days. Why on earth doesn't Charley marry her straight off? I suppose he means to, or they would not keep her in the house. She has enough to live on and could be easily provided for in England;" this, it need scarcely be explained, was another soliloquy. When he got into the train at V—— *en route* for Naples, it was this subject which was occupying his thoughts, and the reader will soon understand that he was justified in considering that the state of things at Santa Croce was in truth very extraordinary indeed. Now, perhaps, we had better return there, and watch the course of events.

Mrs. Upton was, as has been said, an invalid, as far as the use of her lower limbs was concerned, and lived in a suite of rooms on the ground floor of the palace. On the floor above were her son's quarters, and next to these some half-a-dozen pretty, sunny rooms, belonging to Milly Carruthers and the elderly English maid who attended to her special needs. Mrs. Upton lived entirely in her own part of the house, though Milly and her son always paid her a daily visit, but in reality the suffering woman preferred to be alone with the memories which were so dear to her, and which the presence of others seemed to her to interfere with in some fashion. Her son on his part appeared also to prefer his own company, though he liked to have Milly about, for the surroundings of his home seemed wanting in completeness without a lady at the head of the table and in the drawing-room in the long winter evenings.

They kept foreign hours as far as their meals were concerned, and the twelve o'clock breakfast and seven o'clock dinner were partaken of in company, though without the presence of Mrs. Upton, who never came to that part of the house, and it was this state of things which, naturally enough, struck Jack Mowbray with astonishment when he became a member of the household. There would be also afternoon tea in the drawing-room or on the terrace which looked down over the sea, and after or before this function, according to the season of the year, Captain Upton

would take his cousin for a ride among the mountains around them, both of them mounted on huge, strong donkeys, brought from the island of Pantelleria, which lay towards the south. Sometimes in the early morning, after they had had coffee in their own quarters, the two would stroll about the garden or vineyard together, consulting about the flower-beds, feeding the gold and silver fish, or talking over some new book which had lately arrived from England, all in the world like a strongly-attached brother and sister, and though this kind of close intimacy had been going on for nearly a whole year nothing had as yet come of it.

In England, of course, such an arrangement would hardly have been possible, but in South Italy one can do as one likes, as Mrs. Upton remarked once to a friend, who had ventured to suggest that there was a slight flavour of impropriety about the whole proceeding. She had repeated the remark to her son, and since that no English visitor had been invited to the house except Jack Mowbray, who might be trusted, his friend knew, to keep his opinions to himself. Milly was a pleasant adjunct to the household; she taught the village children to read, looked after the satellites in the kitchen, and seemed perfectly happy in the state of life in which she had been placed. Indeed, she evinced a strong desire to remain out of her native country, and in deference to her wish, they had all spent the previous summer in Switzerland.

"The place is at its loveliest just now," Captain Upton was saying to her, one glorious spring day in March, as they sauntered round the garden. Milly was gathering flowers for the house, and dropping them into a basket which he held for her. "But do you know, my mother and I have been thinking that you, on the contrary, have not been looking your best of late. She says that you declare yourself to be perfectly well, and if that is so, there must be some other reason for those pale cheeks we have been noticing lately. Is it that you find the life here too dull and monotonous, I wonder? Do you perhaps feel the want of a girl friend—sometimes? If so, I wish you would tell us."

"No, no," she replied hastily, and there was no want of colour in her cheeks now. "I am happier than I thought it possible to be here, and if you don't find me in the way, I hope you will let me stay."

"My dear Milly, what a way to put it! We are, as you know, delighted to have you, but——" and he stopped, not wishing to utter what was in his mind. He did not often say as much as this, for he was a man who liked people to take things for granted, but the fact was, he was certain that he had seen the traces of tears in his cousin's eyes more than once of late, and this disturbed him not a little. He had not mentioned this to his mother, feeling that the girl would give her confidence if she desired to do so; her nature was, he knew, very like his own, and though the two women were the best of friends, he had a sort of idea that Milly might prefer to consult him about any trouble she might have, knowing that he would more readily understand her.

"All the same it is rather an unnatural life for you, when one comes to think of it," he continued. "When Mowbray was here, he took occasion to make that remark, and I could not contradict him. I am afraid it is rather selfish of us to keep you shut up here without a companion, when—as he also remarked—most people would ask a lot of visitors to make the place a little more lively for you. If there is any one you would like to have, my mother would write an invitation at once, you know."

"I always tell you the truth, don't I, Charley?" was the reply.

"I am sure you do."

"Then believe me when I say the one thing I desire is to go on living my present life, without any change whatever. I should hate to see the house full of visitors."

"So should I," he answered, much relieved. He too was perfectly content, and was glad to believe the girl beside him was of the same opinion.

There was a long silence between them; Milly announced at last that she had gathered flowers enough and that she was going to sit on the terrace and arrange them.

"I will come with you, if you will let me," he said. Her companionship was becoming very pleasant to him, and then he still had an uneasy feeling that all was not quite right with her.

"Oh surely," she answered. "But I thought you were always too busy at eleven o'clock to bestow your company on me."

"It is only a little after ten, and I am going to give myself a holiday for once," and then he found a shady seat for her, and brought a table close to it for her flowers and vases. He sat down at her side and watched her idly for a time, wondering a

little what was in her mind. He knew very little about women, and had never been much in their company; Milly suited him exactly. There was no self-consciousness about her, or nonsense of any kind; her eyes would meet his own with a frank, clear gaze, and he could see she was as innocent as a child. But he was only human after all, and of late he had been aware that some strange new feeling had begun to stir within him which he did not care to analyze; this morning a sudden desire had come to him to see more of his cousin and to get her, if possible, to tell him something of her former life, about which she had always been strangely silent.

"Milly," he said at last, "may I ask you a question?"

"Yes," she answered, rather surprised, and then as her eyes met his and she saw a look in them which she had never noticed before, a bright colour came into her cheeks. He noted the fact, and wondered a little.

"I want you to tell me if you have ever had a love affair?"

The question was the one she had least expected; she answered somewhat hurriedly: "No, at least not a real one."

"What do you mean by that? I am not asking out of idle curiosity, dear," he went on, drawing a little nearer to her side. "I can't help taking an interest in you, you know; I like you so much. If you had any trouble of that kind on your mind and would let me help you, if I could, it would be a satisfaction to me." It had already been a satisfaction to him to hear that she had disclaimed the idea.

"Why should you think that I had? It is very kind of you to care, though. You would not call a little boy-and-girl nonsense that happened when I was too young to understand, and when the other person was just as silly and not much older than myself, a love affair, would you?"

"Well, no, I suppose not. But it would all depend on whether either of the parties to it had kept it up in any sense. Is there anything of the kind in your case; are you bound in any way, or do you fancy yourself to be so?"

"Oh no, surely not." There was an amount of passion in her tone that took him by surprise and interested him at once. He had kept out of this sort of thing since he had grown to man's estate, and though he intended to marry some day, he had no desire to do so at present, so Milly's sisterly unconsciousness had

supplied the slight natural desire he had felt for a woman's company in a most satisfactory way. She had never tried to attract him, and he had imagined her life to have been a blank page. If she had not been a relative he recognized the fact that she would have made him a very suitable wife, but he had a strong dislike to consanguineous marriages, and having much self-restraint and no temptations, he had not as yet, at all events, fallen in love with her, as Jack Mowbray suggested he ought to have done.

Just then the luncheon bell rang ; both of them had begun to be aware that their demeanour to each other had been disturbed a little from its usual propriety, and both were glad of the distraction, but though he made no more attempts that day to resume the conversation with his cousin, he determined that at some future time he would try once more to gain her confidence. It was a duty he owed to the girl, as one of her few remaining relatives, to help her in any difficulty while she lived under his own roof.

The days passed on as usual ; Captain Upton was sent for to see a friend who had been taken ill suddenly in Naples. He did not care much for the man, but could never refuse to do a kindness, and as he sat and watched by the sick bed he found himself constantly thinking of Milly's sweet, rather sad face, and wondering as before what had brought the cloud over it which he had lately noticed. His friend died and he remained to bury him and to settle his affairs, and more than a month had passed since his conversation with Milly on the terrace when he returned to Santa Croce one afternoon in April. He had not given notice of his coming, and after going into his mother's apartments to greet her, ran upstairs to find his cousin. He had certainly missed her very much indeed.

She was not in the drawing-room or on the terrace, and her maid, they told him, had gone for a walk. He had never been in the habit of going into the little morning-room which specially belonged to her, but a slight impatience which he did not care to restrain possessed him just then, and he walked along the terrace and looked into her window to see if she were there. She was sitting in a corner of the couch, her head buried in the cushions, sobbing bitterly, as if her heart would break.

Poor child ! Then there was something wrong ; he would try to make her confess that very night. After dinner he always sat

with her awhile, generally reading aloud or getting her to sing to him ; this must not be allowed to go on, and he stole quietly away to his own quarters.

They met at dinner as usual ; Milly was very pale and her eyes, which she scarcely raised, told tales, but she looked so sweet and fair and womanly that the man's heart stirred within him, and he knew that a change was coming into his life. He had fallen in love or was on the brink of it.

She stayed in the drawing-room for a few minutes after the meal was finished, and then remarking that she had letters to write, said she would bid him good-night. But an imperative desire to have it out with her had arisen in his mind, and instead of acquiescing quietly, as he would have done a few short weeks ago, he kept her hand in his.

"I think it is very unkind of you to leave me to myself on the first evening of my return, Milly," he said, still holding her. "It chills a man, you know, to find he isn't wanted when he gets back after a good long absence."

"Don't say that, Charley," she answered gravely. "I am very glad indeed to have you again. I will stay, of course, if you wish it."

"I do wish it. Let me put your shawl on for you and then come out into the garden. The moon is out and the air is soft and lovely."

He held out his arm, and though she hesitated a moment, she took it and they began to pace up and down the terrace together, talking of indifferent things. Then they were silent for awhile ; he led her to the parapet and they stood looking down on the sea ; the moon was casting silver gleams across it.

"Milly," he said at last, "you trust me, I think."

"Of course I do."

"Then will you tell me why you were crying so this afternoon when I came to your window ? I am a great deal older than you, dear, and I might be able to help you if I knew what your trouble was, for I am now certain that you have one."

He felt the hand on his arm tremble a little ; he laid his own on it and held it in a firm grasp. Something in the touch of the strong fingers seemed to give the girl courage and she turned to him suddenly.

"Charley, you are right ; I have a great trouble, and I should

like to tell it you, for there is nobody else in the world that I trust as I do you, and your mother is not strong enough to be worried. But first will you promise me never to mention it to any living soul?"

He considered a moment. To give such a promise might not be to her interest.

"I think you had better leave that to my own judgment," he said. "I am very fond of you; I have only quite lately found it out, and you may trust me to do nothing that would injure you."

She stood close to him in silence for a few minutes, then he heard a low whisper:

"I am married, Charley; at least, I am afraid so."

He started violently, and then thinking he could not have heard aright, said gravely:

"My dear child, do you know what you are saying?"

"Yes, only too well;" and then her frame was shaken by sobs once more. He put out his arm instinctively to support her; she never needed it more, he thought. After awhile she became more composed and he led her to a seat, placed himself by her side, and still holding her trembling fingers in his own, said gently:

"Now try and explain yourself, Milly, for I think it is very evident I ought to hear more."

"I will tell you all, Charley," she answered, "only don't blame me more than you can help. You have heard, I think, that Mrs. Marsden, who brought me up, had a son."

"Yes."

"Well, we were playmates together, and one day—it was my sixteenth birthday, I remember—he brought me a present of a story-book. The subject of the book was some nonsense about an elopement and a Scotch marriage, and he begun to talk to me about it, and went on to say that he was very fond of me indeed and would like to marry me. I laughed at the whole thing and would not listen, but he stayed a fortnight with us and day after day the same subject seemed to be in his mind. Then he went back to Oxford, and came to us again at Christmas, and asked me if I would go through a Scotch marriage ceremony with him, as it would be useless to ask my guardian's consent to an engagement. If I would do this, he said he would come forward and claim me

when I was twenty-one, and we could be married properly in church. He brought a number of foolish novels, which I ought not to have been allowed to read, I know now, but at sixteen one has not learned to discriminate. I suppose it was as much the influence of these as his persuasions, but at last I began to think it would be very romantic to be engaged secretly, and I consented to that. One day when we were out together, he took me to a cottage in the next village, where a man and his wife who were strangers to me were living, and said that these people would bind us together in a way that would make it impossible for any one to separate us, and he showed me a ring which looked exactly like a wedding ring, but which he said I need not wear, as it was merely to be considered a sign of our engagement, but I was to be sure never to lose it. You understand that I was merely a silly baby, don't you, Charley, and that I had no idea that I was going to commit myself seriously?"

"Yes, child, yes." But oh, the pity of it, he thought; the pity of it. "How old was the fellow?"

"About nineteen or twenty, I think. Of course I was as much to blame as he, I suppose, and Mrs. Marsden let me do exactly as I liked, and trusted me, I am ashamed to say; it would have been better had she not done so. The end of it was that I consented to have the ring put on, and some questions were asked us, as to whether we would take each other as husband and wife, and these did frighten me a little at the time. Then I think I signed some paper which I did not read, but I thought so little of the affair that it almost passed from my memory, though I always had a feeling that once in my life I had been a very naughty girl indeed, and had deceived everybody, but I did not like to confess because Willie made me promise not to do so till he gave me permission." She paused here; her hand lay still in his.

"Did you see the fellow—the boy, I mean, after this?"

"Oh, yes, several times. Then about six months—or perhaps a year—after my guardian told Mrs. Marsden he thought Willie was getting too big to be seen walking about with me, and though he came once or twice to see his mother I never met him again. He went to Canada and is there still."

"Was he ever alone with you after this—this ceremony, or whatever it was?"

"Yes."

"Did he—did he attempt to treat you with more familiarity than he had done before? I must ask this, Milly, for you need a friend, and I cannot act for you unless I know all."

"Once. Only once."

"Tell me—that is, I suppose he tried to kiss you?"

"Yes."

"And put his arm round you and that sort of thing?"

"Oh, no, I was old enough to know better than to allow him to do that, although I had acted so foolishly. He took my hand and kissed me once—I did not know he meant to—but I never let him do it again."

"You are quite sure."

"Positive. And after he kissed me that once I had a sort of dislike to his company, and I never was alone with him again. Never once."

"Then he did not seem to consider himself married to you?"

"Not then. But—oh, Charley, how shall I tell you!"

"Go on, my dear; tell me all."

"Well, as I said, the matter almost passed from my mind; then as I grew older and read more I began to wonder if I really was married in a sort of fashion. I resolved never to see him again, in any case, and I made up my mind that it would be all right—no one would ever know, and I must take care not to fall in love, or let any one get to care for me, that would be all. But three months ago I had a letter from him, claiming me as his wife, and asking me to come over to Montreal and be married to him again in church. The very idea fills me with horror!"

"Why does he not show himself over here?"

"He has been very ill; some lung trouble or other and is not able to travel. He says it is my duty to come to him. And, Charley, I have been longing to tell you all this and to ask you to find out, if you can, if I am really married or not. I do not love him, of course, in the very least, but I must pay for my folly, I suppose, if what was done was legal. I cannot go to him, though, I think, unless you tell me that it is my duty. God help me! I am very miserable."

He put his arm about her and drew her close; he loved her, he knew it now, and he thought if this wretched business could be proved to be of no importance that she would turn to him, perhaps. Thank Heaven, she had known how to take care of

herself afterwards, at all events. After thinking carefully over the matter for some little time, he told her that he would himself go over to Montreal at once, see Marsden and get from him all particulars. He would then place the matter in his own lawyer's hands; he was a trustworthy man and no one but himself should know what was being done, only Milly must give him full authority and must write a letter to Marsden stating that she could not consider herself to be his wife, nor had she any desire to become so. The hopefulness of his words gave her courage and she listened eagerly to his plans.

"There must eventually be some publicity, I fear," he said, "but you have nothing to be ashamed of. My mother need not know, and you, I think, have not any relatives but ourselves, have you?"

"None that I know of, and except Mrs. Marsden, no friend; merely a few acquaintances about whom I care little. No girl, I fancy, was ever kept so shut up as I was. But it will be very unpleasant for you. Perhaps I ought to go away. Mrs. Marsden would take me in; she must of course be told."

"Yes, that would, I think, be desirable. But I shall not allow you to go away, Milly. You will stay here like a good girl and take care of my mother while I am absent. Then if I have nothing but bad news to bring you, you must still stay here, if possible, and I will help you to bear your trouble as well as I know how. If he has the right to call you wife, he will indeed be a brute if he attempts to force you to come and live with him when you tell him you have no desire to do so. It is so, dear, is it not? You have no desire?"

"Charley, I feel as if I would rather kill myself than go and live with him. I may have to do so, I suppose; but I don't think I should live long under such a yoke. I liked him very well as a boy to play with, but now that I am old enough to know what marriage means, death seems to me to be preferable to such a union as that would be."

"Could you show me his letters?"

"Yes, oh yes," she said rising. "I will go and fetch them; there are but two." When she returned and gave them to him, she held out her hand to say good-night. He took it and looked into her eyes, now so full of sadness; she met his glance and said in broken tones:

"Dear Charley, my kind good cousin, I shall always love you as if you were my own brother for your kindness to me to-night."

He bent forward and kissed her gently on the forehead, then as she was about to leave him he yielded to a sudden temptation and took her into his arms. "Milly," he said, "I can never be a brother to you. But if all goes well and this trouble turns out to have no real foundation—if we can find the fellow who did the trick, for I think he would hardly have dared to make it a legal union—I hope I may become something nearer and dearer." Then he let her go, and she rushed away to her own room.

Captain Upton knew nothing whatever of Scotch law, but he determined to consult those who did without any delay, and the very next day he started for London, intending to sail for Canada at once. He had taken the disease called love rather later than most men; the attack promised to be a severe one, and though he knew that he might never be allowed to call Milly his wife, he hoped all the same to be able to keep her at Santa Croce—a mad idea which he would have been the first to denounce in the abstract, had any one consulted him in a similar case.

Milly tried to hope against hope during his absence; each time the post came in she would look anxiously over the letters, for her cousin had promised that his lawyer should communicate with her as well as himself if he had any trace of the occupants of the cottage where the affair took place, for it appeared that they had left the neighbourhood directly afterwards. He wrote to her on his arrival in London, bidding her keep up her spirits and notifying his departure for Liverpool and Canada that very night. A fortnight passed away and then she received a telegram from him, stating that he had arrived in Montreal and had seen Marsden; the result of the interview he would send her by letter.

This was the hardest time of all; she waited in deep anxiety during the next fortnight and at last a thick packet arrived for her, addressed in her cousin's hand.

"Dear Milly," it ran, "I am writing this in the room below that which Marsden is occupying. His mother is with him, and I learn from her that she heard from her son for the first time about what you confided to me some three weeks ago. He is very ill, and the doctor who is attending him informs me that

he cannot live more than a few weeks. He is scarcely allowed to speak at all, but from the few words I have exchanged with him I learn that he evidently considers that you are man and wife, and declares that proof of this would be easy. I am sorry to say that he declines altogether to believe that his days are numbered, as his appearance and the verdict of more than one of the best medical men here proclaim to be the case, for I at once called in further advice on my own responsibility. He has, he says, laid the whole case before a competent legal adviser, and, as soon as he is able to do so, intends to resort to strong measures to compel you to come to him. But he never will be able to do so, and his state of health makes it impossible for me to speak to him as I should naturally do were he in a different position. I have, however, told him that as your nearest relative, I should take steps on my own account to have the matter properly sifted, should his life be prolonged. It seemed cruel to inform a dying man that it was all but impossible that the necessity for this would ever arise. His own account of the matter, which he wrote down for his mother's perusal, shows that he knew pretty well what he was doing when he entrapped you as he did, young as he was, and exonerates you completely, for he confesses that you were a most unwilling victim, but that he was determined to force you into consenting. He would have claimed you on your twenty-first birthday, but you had just started on your visit to us, and he thought it wiser to wait a year longer.

"Things being as they are, I think I can serve you best by waiting out here to see what happens; it appears to me to be unnecessary to take any further steps, when death may solve the problem at any moment."

Milly read the letter through in breathless excitement. When she came to the end of it she fell on her knees by her bedside. Was it wicked to be unable to feel sorrow at the death of a fellow-creature because he had injured her? She tried to keep back the relief at her heart; how heavy the burden had been she had scarcely known till now, when it was about to be lifted from her.

A month passed by. Captain Upton wrote from time to time, and then one morning a telegram arrived. The end had come, and he was to start the next day for home. Milly lay awake at night, listening to every breeze that blew. She dared now

to think of those words of his—"something nearer and dearer." She had never suspected till he uttered them that he regarded her in any other light than that of a favourite sister; for her own part, she had believed that the blight on her life must be a safeguard against any such weakness. Perhaps she had been mistaken.

She did not know when to expect her cousin; he had purposely refrained from telling her. One evening in May she was sitting alone in the garden under the terrace walls, enjoying the cool air—for summer had set in at Santa Croce, and but for the absence of the master of the house they would have already started northwards—when she heard steps in one of the rooms above. Had he come at last? How dared she go to meet him?

Presently her name was called from a window overhead; he was standing there watching her.

"Come up," he said, "and give me some dinner. I am very hungry after my long journey."

She rose at once, and in a few moments was standing by his side. He took both her hands and looked down into her eyes; they met his for an instant and then fell beneath his glance. Luigi, the man-servant, began to clatter the plates outside.

"After dinner is over we will have our talk, dear," he said, releasing her; and during the meal he told her of various incidents of his journey. He saw that she could not bear much just then.

"Bring the coffee outside on the terrace, Luigi," he said when the meal was over.

He had forced her to eat something, and her usual composure had returned to her. They strolled together for awhile among the flowers, speaking of everything but the subject nearest their hearts just then.

"You will be tired," he remarked at last. "Come up to the terrace again, and we will talk over our plans for the summer. We ought to be moving next week."

He led her up the steps, taking her hand in his as if she had been a child. They seated themselves in a favourite corner overlooking the sea.

"I want to go yachting again this year," he remarked. "You are a good sailor, I know."

"Yes," she replied. "But I thought your mother——"

She did not finish her sentence, for a strange thrill went through her as she was uttering the words, which seemed to make further speech impossible for the moment. He had thrown his arm along the back of the seat and his hand had touched her shoulder.

"Milly," he said at last, after a long silence, "will you try and forget this foolish affair which has made you so unhappy? The principal actor in it is no longer in this world; I saw him laid to rest with my own eyes. At the very last he sent for me, and asked me to tell you that he was sorry he had brought it all on you, and begged for your forgiveness. I took on myself to say that you would grant it, and the poor foolish fellow took comfort, I think. I knew you would be glad to hear this, and now I think we may consider the subject done with for ever; I should like you to promise me that you will put it out of your mind. Will you?"

"Yes," she answered. "How can I ever thank you for all you have done for me, Charley. I have said no word of gratitude, but I shall remember it all my life long."

He did not reply. Words were trembling on his lips which he was longing to utter; but he wanted some assurance first as to whether the girl loved him before doing so. He was not at all sure that she did, as yet. The moon was shining full on her face; he turned to look at her, but her eyes met his now with a calm, untroubled glance; the relief he had brought her had been so great, she could think of nothing else for the moment. But then he felt he could bear it no longer.

His arm stole round her and he tried to draw her close to him; she resisted for a moment and then suddenly yielded. He turned her face towards him and pressed his lips to hers. She put her hand timidly on his shoulder; then he knew.

"Will you be my wife, Milly?" were the words he whispered in her ear. The little hand which rested on his shoulder stole round his neck; no words would come, but he was answered all the same.

"I thought you considered it wrong for cousins to marry, Charley," she remarked about half-an-hour later, when they had come back to their senses once more.

"So I do: first cousins. I should not have thought of allowing you to fall in love with me if that had been the relationship

between us," he said audaciously. Then he took a ring out of his waistcoat-pocket and fitted it on her finger, remarking as he did so, that it would soon have to be replaced by another, as he meant to take her yachting with him that summer. "Jack Mowbray must be my best man," he continued. "How he will triumph over me when he hears that I have succumbed already; it is only six months since he left us. He did not dare to say anything openly to me on the subject, but I could see that he considered that our duty lay plain before us, and marvelled in his own mind at our having evaded it so long."

They were married with all possible expedition that very summer. I spent one golden autumn with them not many years ago, and I came to the conclusion that they were the most satisfactory couple of my acquaintance. They had no child, but they were as happy as the day is long all the same.

Some two months ago, however, I saw an announcement in the *Times* which led me to suppose that that omission had been rectified at last by the appearance of a son and heir, and a subsequent letter from Captain Upton confirmed the fact.

"We have a splendid boy," he wrote, and I was very glad that it was so. It seemed a pity that that beautiful old place should pass into the hands of strangers. He loves it well, and now it will have for him an additional attraction.

Lady Milchester's Diamonds.

By RICHARD WARFIELD,

Author of "MRS. BARFIELD'S JEWELS," "A BURTON CRESCENT MYSTERY,"
etc.

CHAPTER I.

SHELDRAKE-ON-SEA is a quiet little town on the eastern coast of England. It is by no means a fashionable resort, nor as yet has the solitary railway company that runs trains for the benefit of those who may desire to visit it, seen fit to turn it into a watering place for the million. No, trips to Sheldrake are unknown, much to the gratification of the householders there, who are quite content with the harvest they reap from the staid, steady-going people who annually spend their summer holiday at it. In fact, the good folk of Sheldrake depend but little on strangers for their livings. There are sufficient moneyed, if not wealthy, people in the place to make it prosperous without adventitious or extraneous assistance.

Moreover, Sheldrake is a very conservative town, and, as such, treats all strangers with a certain amount of suspicion, especially if they show the least disposition to make their permanent home in the neighbourhood of its shingly beach.

You will understand, then, that when a new doctor, *i.e.*, a strange doctor, suddenly swooped down upon the inhabitants of Sheldrake, rented the best house on their esplanade, and announced his name and profession with a glittering brass plate on his door, "a plate," as somebody said, "as vulgar as a warming pan," excitement and indignation ran high. Curiosity, too, was not lacking.

"How is the fellow going to live?" demanded old Doctor Parsons crustily. "He'll be in the workhouse in six months."

"And we shall have to pay to help to keep him," groaned his friend and colleague, Doctor Rodgers, who hated disbursement of any kind.

"I call it impudence, his daring to come to oppose us," grumbled Doctor Parsons. "The idea of a nincompoop of whom nobody knows anything having the insolence to flaunt a door-plate in our faces!"

"He shall be punished," cried Rodgers in a menacing tone; "I shall refuse to meet him in consultation."

"Capital!" chuckled his partner; "I'll do the same—that will settle him."

Having thus satisfactorily arranged for the complete annihilation of the new-comer, the two old gentlemen sipped a glass of sherry apiece and toddled off home.

Meanwhile, Doctor Urmston, for so the stranger was named, sat in his consulting room and waited for patients. They were rather shy of coming; Messrs. Parsons and Rodgers had tinkered at their constitutions so long that they were afraid to intrust them into other hands. When Doctor Urmston had been three months in the place not a single resident had been to him for advice; the only money he had taken had been captured from members of the floating population. The old-established firm was correspondingly jubilant.

Let us take a look at Doctor Urmston, as, with folded arms, he sat before his fire one cold January morning. He was a tall, muscular man, with a well-knit, sinewy frame—a man in the prime of life. His eyes, large but piercing, were of a jetty blackness, his face decidedly handsome, but the thin, closely-compressed lips betokened temper. A shrewd observer could not fail to think that there was withal about the doctor somewhat of a cruel look.

"I have been here exactly three months," he mused, "and at present I have made no headway among these dolts. It is time there was a change. Yes; I feel that a change is coming." Doctor Urmston was clearly of a sanguine nature.

A timid ring at the house-bell now attracted his attention. "I should not wonder," he said to himself, and he smiled grimly, "if that ring be the turning-point of my career in Sheldrake."

"A lady wishes to see you, sir," said a page-boy, entering the room.

"Let her wait ten minutes and then show her in, Thompson," replied the doctor. His heart began to beat rapidly, and he betrayed other signs of unusual excitement. "I'm as unnerved as the veriest child," he muttered, "and perhaps it is not the right woman after all."

The time passed slowly, but at length, with a tremendous flourish, Thompson ushered in the lady.

Doctor Urmston advanced to meet her and offered her a chair.

She came forward shyly and with a hesitating step. "Doctor Urmston, I believe?" she murmured, sinking into the proffered seat. Her voice was sweet and clear, and she gazed at the doctor with half-frightened eyes.

The doctor bowed.

"My brother," she continued, in more assured tones, "my brother is very ill, poor boy; I wish you to come to see him."

"What is his complaint?" asked the doctor.

"A weak spine. He has been getting gradually worse and worse for the last year. Nine months ago we came to reside in this town, hoping that the sea air might be of benefit to him, but our hopes were vain. He grows daily more of an invalid. Doctor Parsons and Doctor Rodgers have both attended him, but they have done him no good, and I thought I'd try you."

"I am much flattered," answered Doctor Urmston; "but have you informed the other doctors of your decision?"

"Oh! yes, and I don't think they liked it. 'You must fully understand, madam,' they said in a breath, and the speaker's face lighted up with a wan smile, the first since she had entered the room, 'you must fully understand that we most absolutely decline to meet Doctor Urmston in consultation.'"

"And your reply, madam?"

"I told them I could dispense with their services for the future."

"Then I shall have much pleasure in attending your brother."

"And oh! doctor," the lady exclaimed, as she rose to depart, "you will do your best for my dear brother, won't you? I sometimes fear I am to lose him altogether. You will save him if you can, will you not?"

"Rest assured, I will use my utmost skill."

On the very threshold of the room the lady turned again.

"What an unbusiness-like man you are, Doctor Urmston," she said severely, "you are allowing me to go away without inquiring my name or where I live. How can you possibly visit my brother unless you know his name and address?"

The doctor was profuse in his apologies, and, thus mollified, the lady went away, having first handed him her card, on which

was inscribed, Miss Blake, Seaview Cottage, West Cliff, Shel-drake-on Sea.

A pretty woman was Laura Blake, and so thought Doctor Urmston, as from the window he watched her figure flit down the esplanade. I say "flit" advisedly, for there was about her walk a light, sylph-like grace of movement, as charming as uncommon. The keen frosty air had given Miss Blake a higher colour than was usual to her and enhanced her beauty, and on her homeward way she was the unconscious recipient of many an envious feminine, and admiring masculine, glance.

Having reached and entered Seaview Cottage, which stood a little way out of the town, Miss Blake hastily threw aside her wraps in the hall and at once went to her brother.

"Did you think me long, Algy?" she asked, bending down to stroke the sick lad's hair. "Has Hannah been good to you while I was away? Yes! but it is not like having Laura, is it, dear?"

Algernon Blake was a pale, delicate-looking boy of twenty; his thin, drawn face was stamped with the hues of ill-health; and a habitual expression of peevishness, no doubt the fruit of suffering, added further to its disfigurement. At any time it is a trying ordeal to have to lie on one's back when one wishes to be up and about, and it must be doubly so at the very opening of life. This Laura Blake knew, and she bore her brother's fretfulness with exemplary patience, for she was much attached to him.

"When is the doctor coming?" Algy inquired, without deigning to reply to either her questions or caress.

"He'll be here shortly," his sister answered. "My poor Algy! I wish I could help you to bear your trouble."

Even while she spoke Doctor Urmston rang the bell. Having thoroughly overhauled his new patient, the doctor pronounced the case far from incurable. "Time and careful attention, my dear Miss Blake, may do wonders," he declared. "I have treated many people similarly afflicted, and I can recall to mind more than one instance of complete recovery, when the patient's condition has been far more serious than your brother's."

Laura Blake brightened wonderfully on hearing this.

"There! Algy, you need despair no more," she said. "You hear what the doctor thinks."

"The others did me no good," returned Algy wearily.

When Doctor Urmston left the house he went for a stroll on the sea-shore. His cruel mouth was wreathed by a triumphant smile. "Capital! Capital!" he muttered; "nothing could be better. Yes, Algy, my friend, we'll soon have you all right again. If only—gracious! I say, you——"

"Inspector McVeigh, at your service," cried the jolly-visaged individual with whom the doctor had so unceremoniously collided. "It strikes me we'd both have been better employed in looking where we were going. I hope you are not hurt, sir."

In a few minutes the two men were walking up and down, chatting like old acquaintances. The inspector was in a communicative mood. "No, sir," he returned, in answer to a remark of the doctor, as he lit a cigar that individual had given him, "I cannot say we have much crime down here. Most of our petty sessional work is what I may call public-house cases. We have a larceny job now and then, but there aren't many."

"It's a wonder the Milchester diamonds don't tempt some London cracksman," said the doctor carelessly; "I hear they are of great value."

"Oh! you've heard all about the Milchester jewels, have you, sir?" replied the inspector, bestowing a shrewd glance on his companion. "It is a pity people cannot hold their tongues."

"It is," the doctor assented; "a great pity. By the way, inspector, do you know anything of the people who live in Sea-view Cottage?"

"Not much, sir. They have not been here very long—getting on for a twelvemonth, I should think. But why do you ask, sir?"

"Oh! only because I was called in to-day to see a boy there. He's in a bad way, but I've no doubt I can cure him in time."

"I'm very glad to hear it, sir. My Katie—that's my daughter, sir—she's very much taken up with Miss Blake, and often spends an afternoon at the cottage. They got to know each other through both of them being Sunday school teachers."

"They seem to me to be superior sort of people," continued Doctor Urmston; "and the girl's very pretty."

"Yes, she's a decent-looking young woman," agreed the inspector; "and Sheldrake air must suit her, for she's picked up wonderfully while she has been here. How do you like our little town, sir?"

"First rate," answered the doctor, "though," he added with a laugh, "I should like it better if I could get more patients."

"I am pleased to hear you like the place, sir."

"I like it so well," Doctor Urmston pursued, "that I have written this morning to a young friend of mine in town, begging him to bring his wife down here. She's a delicate woman, and I fancy the Sheldrake air would do her no end of good. They can live with me. My house is big enough for two or three families."

"It's more like a barrack than a house," laughed the inspector. "Well, good morning, sir; I must be going."

"Katie," Inspector McVeigh remarked, when, half-an-hour later, his daughter and he were discussing their midday meal, "Miss Blake has called in this new doctor to attend her brother. What will Parsons and Co. say to that?"

Miss Katie McVeigh tossed her head. "They may say what they like, father; Laura Blake has done quite rightly: they are a couple of old women."

"The young fellow's in a bad way, Doctor Urmston says."

"Yes, father, and poor Laura's a slave to him. He's lucky to have such a sister; she's little less than an angel."

It was about a month after Doctor Urmston's first visit to Algernon Blake that Laura began to notice an alteration in her brother; and when, as the days passed on, it became obvious to all who saw him that he was surely, if slowly, improving under his new treatment, her gladness of heart and thankfulness knew no bounds. Hitherto the prey of a settled melancholy, she now went singing about the house, blithe as a blackbird at mating-time. Nor did she forget to sing the praises of the new doctor, whose skill had wrought such a wonderful transformation in her brother. Far and near she proclaimed his worth, and the object of her encomiums speedily found a large increase in the numbers of his patients.

Now, it happened that Lady Milchester, the owner of the aforementioned jewels, was an old woman, who, crotchety on most points, was especially so in the matter of medical attendants. When, therefore, the trumpeting forth of Doctor Urmston's fame as a healer grew loud enough to invade the precincts of Milchester Towers, her ancestral home, she became keenly desirous of letting him try his power over her rheumatism. No

matter that the complaint was chronic and well-established ; no matter that she had an inward misgiving that nothing short of death would ever cure it, Doctor Urmston had become locally the fashion and Doctor Urmston should be summoned to Milchester Towers.

In pursuance of this object she said one morning, after an unusually late breakfast, to her companion and secretary, Ellen Drew :

"Nelly, my dear, write to Doctor Clarkson by this day's post"—Parsons and Rodgers had long been sent to the right-about by her ladyship as incompetent humbugs—"and inform him that I shall no longer require his services. Tell him, also, to send in his bill ; I'll pay him off and have done with him."

Ellen Drew sat down and wrote the letter.

"And now, Nelly," continued the old lady, when the final scratch of her companion's pen betokened that the missive was completed, "write to Doctor—bless me ! what's the man's name ?"

"Urmston," Miss Drew suggested.

"Yes, to be sure ; Urmston. Well, write to him and ask him to call during the day."

Silence again reigned for a few minutes. The companion finished the letter and sealed it.

"Shall I send it to Sheldrake at once ?" she inquired.

"Yes, Nelly, do, there's a dear."

"If you please, your ladyship," said a servant, entering the room, "Miss McVeigh wishes to speak with your ladyship."

"What ! Katie McVeigh ? Show her in, then," replied Lady Milchester, who was personally acquainted with all the residents for miles around.

"Well, what is it, Katie ?" asked the old lady when, a couple of minutes later, the inspector's daughter stood before her.

"Don't look so frightened, child ! I shan't eat you up. There, sit down ; I declare you're quite flurried."

Katie McVeigh was certainly much excited. She sank into a chair and began to cry. "Oh ! Lady Milchester," she sobbed hysterically, "such a dreadful thing has happened."

"The smelling-salts, Nelly, quick !" cried her ladyship briskly.

Under their soothing influence Katie gradually grew calmer ; and the first thing she did was to make a sudden dive into her

pocket and drag forth a crumpled envelope. Having accomplished this feat, she flung, rather than handed, the envelope to Lady Milchester, and again relapsed into hysterics.

"Goodness me! what's come to the girl?" exclaimed Lady Milchester, with some acerbity of tone. "Attend to her, will you, Nelly, while I try to learn what all this precious fuss is about. I always thought Katie a sensible young woman, but it appears I was wrong."

So saying her ladyship adjusted her binoculars, broke open the envelope, and slowly perused the contents. Her face paled slightly as she took in the meaning. Twice, three times, did she read the letter through before she spoke.

"Katie," she said at last, "don't forget to thank your father for his warning and to tell him I'll take care. And now, if you feel composed enough, let me know exactly what has occurred at Seaview Cottage."

The pith of Katie McVeigh's story was as follows: about two o'clock in the morning Miss Blake had been disturbed by a slight noise. On sitting up and listening she plainly heard whispering downstairs. Being a courageous girl, she slipped quietly out of bed, put on her dressing-gown, and went to investigate the cause of it. Two men were in the sitting-room, drinking Algy's invalid's port and smoking. Their backs were towards her and for a little while they did not notice her. One of them, however, happening to glance up, espied the reflection of her figure in the overmantel. With an oath he sprang to his feet, and seizing her, forced her into an easy-chair where his companion kept guard over her while he ransacked the room. In about half-an-hour they departed with all the booty they could find, leaving the terrified girl in a dead faint. So quietly and expeditiously had they done their work that Algy Blake slept peacefully through the night without waking. "And father says they forced an entrance through the scullery window," finished Katie. Having been regaled with wine and cake, Katie was about to depart, when Ellen Drew proposed that she should leave the note at Doctor Urmston's, as she would have to pass his house to reach home, and thus save sending a special messenger. She gladly acquiesced, being always pleased to do anything for Miss Drew, with whom she was a favourite. Thus it came to pass that shortly afterwards,

while looking out of his window, Doctor Urmston was much astonished to see Miss McVeigh ascending his front door-steps. His face became ashen, but, recovering himself by an effort, he was the self-possessed professional man when his servant entered the room with Katie's note. Two minutes later a broad smile of satisfaction beamed on his countenance, but it was not a pleasing smile; rather was it a wicked smile, such a smile as Satan may often give over the commission of an evil deed.

"Beyond my highest expectations," he muttered. "What a clever girl my Laura is! But," and his brow darkened, "I shall be glad when the farce is played out. I don't like those two being together so long in the cottage."

Some time after the last candle had been extinguished that night in her house, old Lady Milchester rose slowly from her bed, and groping her way to the jewel-chest, emptied its every drawer. "I'll put them," she said to herself, "I'll put them where it would take a very clever thief to find them."

Thus gratulating herself, she moved to a window and drew up the blind. At the same moment the moon burst forth from behind a cloud, and in its pale radiance the jewels flashed and scintillated in her ladyship's hand; flashed and scintillated on the dressing-table, where she had placed some of them when she raised the blind; flashed and scintillated as if they had veritably been endowed with actual life.

Half-an-hour afterwards the moonbeams crept—for she had forgotten to draw down the blind again—stealthily over Lady Milchester's face, showing up every wrinkle and seam, intensifying each pucker and crow's-foot, but she never woke. They crept too lightly for that.

In the same hour Laura Blake was tending her sick brother, for he was more than usually restless; Doctor Urmston was smoking a choice cheroot and felicitating himself on having obtained a footing in Milchester Towers; while Inspector McVeigh, tramping homeward to his well-earned rest, and pondering on the recent robbery at Seaview Cottage, exclaimed, as he drew within sight of the house which occupied his thoughts, "The poor lad must be worse to-night; I can see his sister's shadow moving on the blind."

CHAPTER II.

"It is quite evident," said Inspector McVeigh slowly, tapping his pipe on the corner of the fender to dislodge the ashes, "that something must be done. I am ashamed to show my face out of doors."

When the inspector had any knotty problem to solve, he always did so with the accompaniment of much tobacco, and on the present occasion the problem was very knotty indeed, so much so that three large pipefuls of latakia had left him exactly where he had started. In fact he was completely nonplussed. He laid down his pipe in disgust and thus addressed his daughter, who sat opposite to him, doing patchwork :

"I am not, as you well know, Katie, one of those men who say that all women are fools, and I have good reason to believe that you have more than your share of brains. Now, put that rubbish down a moment and listen to me : On the night of the third or early on the morning of the fourth of last March Seaview Cottage was broken into and robbed. From that date up to the present hour on the twenty-seventh of May there have been no fewer than nine successful burglaries in this town, all, without doubt, the work of the same hands. For reasons which it is unnecessary to go into, it is quite plain that the thieves live among us and that their booty is not carried far away. We have no strangers here now worth speaking of, and none of them has been here more than a week or two. I am quite baffled, Katie."

"You make a mistake, father ; we have some strangers amongst us : Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Pellingham arrived in Sheldrake two days before Seaview Cottage was broken into."

"What? the young swell and his invalid wife, Doctor Urmoston's friends? You are foolish to think of them, Katie. The doctor is sufficient guarantee for their respectability."

"Is he indeed?" rejoined Katie tartly ; "and why should he be, pray? What does any one of us know about him or his career previously to his coming here except what he has told us himself? I should not be a bit surprised if he turned out to be a good-for-nothing. I can't bear the man."

"So I perceive, my dear," answered the inspector smoothly. "However, don't run your head against a brick wall for the sake

of gratifying a little spite. Still, there is some truth in what you say; I'll think it over."

And Inspector McVeigh relit his pipe and again plunged into thought.

When Katie McVeigh spoke slightly of Doctor Urmston and threw out dark hints against his character, she had no object in her mind save that of quietly venting a little ill-nature against a man for whom she had conceived a violent aversion. Not for a moment did she really suspect the doctor of being aught but what he professed to be; and ten minutes after her little outburst, she would have been much surprised could she have known that her hasty words had made any impression on her father. Katie was one of those people who are very strong in their likes and dislikes, and she had taken a great fancy to Laura Blake—a fancy which that young lady apparently reciprocated in her own quiet way—and was quite ready to view the world through Laura's spectacles. Now, after her first feelings of gratitude towards Doctor Urmston for the skill with which he had treated her brother had subsided, Miss Laura Blake began to find out—or, at least, she said she did, which comes to the same thing—that the doctor was not a nice man.

"I don't quite know, dear," she said vaguely to Katie, "what there is in the man that displeases me, but I am never really at ease in his presence. Algy, fortunately, does not share my sentiment of dislike. He and the doctor get on admirably."

"I am glad of that," replied Katie, "and I agree with you, Laura; there is certainly something repellent about Doctor Urmston."

"Not absolutely repellent, dear," corrected Miss Blake; "I did not say that."

"Well, perhaps not repellent," Katie hastened to say; "but something so——"

"Untamed," suggested Laura.

"That very word was on the tip of my tongue," Katie declared. And she believed that she spoke the truth.

Laura Blake smiled to herself. But it is very doubtful whether she would have been so self-complacent had she been aware that in consequence of their conversation Katie would make innuendoes about Doctor Urmston to her father. Perhaps Miss Blake really had an antipathy to the doctor. Who can say? Be that

as it may, however, whatever her object in decrying him had been, it most decidedly had not been her intention that Katie should raise doubts in Inspector McVeigh's mind concerning his integrity.

Though not disposed to attach much importance to his daughter's tirade against Doctor Urmston, the inspector did not let the matter pass entirely out of his memory, and an event shortly occurred which recalled it to his mind with redoubled force. That event was nothing less than the theft of the Milchester jewels. Old Lady Milchester was found bound and gagged one morning, and on being freed, related how she had seen her property abstracted from its hiding place and been powerless to prevent it. "No one but myself," she said, "knew where I kept my jewels. I had not told a soul." And then she went on to relate how, warned by a letter from Inspector McVeigh to guard her gems with especial care, she had secreted them behind a sliding panel in her bed-room.

"And do you say that the burglars made straight for their concealment?" demanded the inspector.

"Yes," returned the old lady, "two of them stayed by me and two of them went directly to the panel and drew it back, though how they knew where to look remains a mystery. I am sure I had mentioned the matter to nobody."

Having gleaned all the information he could, which practically amounted to nothing, Mr. McVeigh proceeded to his own home, and after giving Katie instructions that he was on no account to be disturbed, he filled his favourite meerschaum and sat down to cogitate on the latest outrage. After two hours' deliberation he arrived at the following conclusion: "I have unsuccessfully tried my own ways; I will now try Katie's, and turn my attention to Doctor Urmston. Women can sometimes see further than men, if they *are* guided by instinct instead of reason. I don't believe he's a fraud, but still I remember he seemed to know all about the Milchester jewels the first time I met him."

Within a few days the inspector had learnt all that was known about the doctor. Before going into practice at Sheldrake, he had been in London for two years, where he had not been very successful. Thither he had come from America, being (he stated) by birth a citizen of New York. That was all.

"The information is valueless," mused the inspector; "he has told us as much himself."

It goes without saying that the constant succession of undetected crimes in their midst excited in no small degree the wrath of the Sheldrakers.

Against the police they were absolutely furious, and Inspector McVeigh came in for the greatest share of vituperation. Week by week the *Sheldrake Gazette* hurled its invectives at his head, and fulminated in no measured terms over his crass stupidity; and the poor man, who was, professionally speaking, endued with the thinnest of skins, writhed beneath its repeated onslaughts. He felt that he was hardly treated, though he did not wonder at the bitterness of his foes. Could they, he asked himself, could they have done more in his place? It was just when he was almost on the verge of despair, and seriously thinking of resigning his post, that the thieves—for there were several of them—dropped like ripe plums into his eager hands. By one of those chances which are apt to be called "flukes," though they are clearly designed by the hand of Providence, the whole gang fell into his clutches at one *coup*.

"Katie, my dear," said Laura Blake, chancing to meet the inspector's daughter, in High Street, one sunny afternoon, "Mrs. Pellingham is coming to have tea with Algy and me to-night. Will you come also? Algy is always so cheerful when you are with us."

Katie promised to go, and after a few commonplaces the girls parted.

Mrs. Reginald Pellingham was a big flaxen-haired doll of a Dresden china type of beauty. Her health, she declared, was wretched, but it would have been hard to say exactly what ailed her. Perhaps, like Mrs. Wittiterly, her soul was too large for her body. Be that as it might, however, she was a very pleasant person with whom to spend an evening, and Katie McVeigh took to her at once.

It had been one of Algy's best days; he had, for the first time since he came to Sheldrake, been able to sit up, propped with soft pillows, for an hour or two. Laura was consequently in unusually gay spirits, and the quartette gathered around the tea-table was a very merry one.

"I declare," Mrs. Pellingham exclaimed, with a silvery laugh,

"I have not felt so well for months as I do this evening. What a wonderful place this Sheldrake of yours is, Miss McVeigh. It is fast curing Al—Mr. Blake, and has worked wonders for poor me. I've a great mind to persuade Redge to take a house here."

"What! and leave the doctor alone again? Fie! Mrs. Pellingham," Laura responded. "No doubt he's had quite as much to do with your recovery as the Sheldrake air. It would be cruel to desert him."

"Yes, indeed it would, Mrs. Pellingham," chimed in Katie, anxious to back up Laura.

And thus they talked away—airy, inconsequent chatter, valueless as harmless.

Presently Mrs. Pellingham stretched out her hand, blazing with jewels, for another slice of bread and butter.

"What pretty rings you are wearing," said Katie. "May I look at them after tea? One is just like——"

Katie's sentence came to an abrupt close, for happening to look at her hostess for an endorsement of her admiring sentiments, she was struck with terror by the aspect of that young lady's face. It was of a sickly, ashen hue, and the eye-balls were distended as if in horror.

"Laura! Laura! What is the matter?" she cried.

For answer, Laura Blake uttered a fearful cry, and springing suddenly up, overthrowing the tea-table in her course, with one hand pressed tightly over her heart, she staggered a few paces across the room and sank on to the floor in a dead faint.

The scene that ensued was one of indescribable confusion: Algy Blake tried to rise and go to his sister's assistance, but, after several futile efforts, fell back on his couch with a low moan; Katie, the first shock of astonishment over, flew to her friend's side and raised her head; while Mrs. Pellingham, drenched with scalding tea from head to foot, lay under the table amid the *débris* of the meal, in a fit of violent hysterics.

Finding her attempts to restore animation to Laura to be vain, Katie rang the bell, but no servant coming in reply (as a matter of fact the Blakes' one domestic was stone deaf), she placed a cushion under her friend's head and set about rescuing Mrs. Pellingham from her unenviable position. And a nice plight that lady was in. Katie could barely keep back her laughter.

Laura Blake now heaved a faint sigh, and Mrs. Pellingham

being by this time somewhat recovered, though still in a flabby condition, Katie despatched her for Doctor Urmston. She (Mrs. Pellingham) brisked up wonderfully on this; announced, in fact, that she felt quite well again, and ran off with what Katie thought surprising rapidity.

Meanwhile, Doctor Urmston and Reginald Pellingham were having a quiet confabulation over their after-dinner coffee and pipes—for the doctor invariably dined late.

"We've been uncommonly lucky, Redge, my boy," said the doctor cheerfully, "but I think we'd better dry up now and make a move. Upon my word, Algy and Laura are a clever couple. That weak back of Algy's has been a trump card."

"How did he blind these doctors at Sheldrake?" inquired Mr. Pellingham. "It would be difficult work, I expect."

"Not at all," laughed the other; "the easiest thing in the world. They are both about as ignorant of their own profession as it is possible for two men to be; and as they did not understand Algy's complaint—and I am not surprised at that," with a grim smile—"they imagined it to be some obscure and little-known disease with which they were unacquainted. They consequently looked very wise, and kept their thoughts to themselves."

"Wherein they showed their wisdom," rejoined Pellingham. "But, I say, doctor, it must have been awfully trying for Algy, that lying all day on his back."

"Of course, it was," assented the doctor, "but that was not half as bad as the drug-taking to give him the required appearance of ill-health. I tell you, Redge, that boy's taken enough poison to murder a townful of people. I don't believe his constitution will ever get over it. My heart's almost failed me sometimes when I've seen his poor haggard face. He's a resolute chap or he would never have gone through with it."

The two men puffed away at their pipes in silence for some time; then the younger burst into a loud laugh.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it was a grand idea of Laura's to make a bosom friend of old McVeigh's daughter. You ought to be proud of your girl, doctor."

"So I am, Redge," agreed his companion; "but Algy's every bit as smart as she. You ought to be equally proud of your brother. They're a splendid pair."

Silence again reigned, and this time was broken by a long peal at the house bell.

"Bother it!" muttered Doctor Urmston. "I hope I have not to go out again this evening."

In a minute the room door was flung open and in rushed Mrs. Pellingham. The men jumped up and gazed at her in alarm.

"Never mind me; I'm all right," she gasped, "but go—go to Laura, doctor. She's dying of heart disease."

The words were accompanied with a lot of pantomimic gesture.

Doctor Urmston and his friend hastened away to Seaview Cottage, leaving Mrs. Pellingham to change her wet garments. Having done so, she drew all the rings off her fingers and locked them up.

"What a blundering fool I've been," she told herself. "Redge will be fit to murder me when he comes back, and I dread to meet the doctor."

And the thought of her husband's and her host's anger made Mrs. Pellingham quake with fear. Nor was she afraid without cause: Mr. Pellingham returned home in a towering passion.

"You incomparable idiot!" he cried wrathfully, striding to where she sat cowering in an easy-chair. "What do you mean by playing the fool like this? I've a great mind to—" and he raised his clenched fist.

"Oh! don't, Redge, don't hit me!" she pleaded, shrinking backward. "Forgive me, Redge; forgive me."

Reginald Pellingham was a bad man, but he was neither a coward nor a brute; he was, moreover, greatly attached to his wife. His arm fell to his side and he stared at her in moody silence.

"I believe you wish to ruin me, Ella," he said at last.

The woman fell at his feet, sobbing, and clasping his right hand, smothered it with kisses. "Don't say that, Redge; don't say that. It is cruel of you. Am I not daily selling my very soul at your bidding?"

He gently stroked her hair. She knew she was forgiven, and went on:

"Redge, my darling, why not be as we used to be before we met this wretched Doctor Urmston? We were happy enough then, if we were poor. What better are we for our ill-gotten wealth? It goes as fast as it comes, and we never know a moment's peace."

"You talk like a foolish child, Ella."

"No, Redge," she answered, with great earnestness; "I speak what I know to be the truth."

We must now, however, return to Katie McVeigh. Having left Laura Blake safely in Doctor Urmston's hands, she went home in a state of no little perturbation. She was, in truth, greatly flustered.

"What! back already, Katie?" asked her father in much surprise. "Why, I did not look for your coming for another couple of hours."

Then Katie related what had taken place. Inspector McVeigh listened in silence until his daughter had done; then he took a long pull at his meerschaum.

"What made you wish to examine Mrs. Pellingham's rings?" he inquired. "Was there anything striking about them?"

"Nothing particular, father," replied the girl; "but one was just like a ring Lady Milchester used to wear, and I thought I should like to see it closer."

"Oh! that was all, was it?" commented the inspector, laying down his pipe and rising and putting on his hat. "Well, I think I'll go for a stroll before turning in. You need not sit up for me, Katie."

And not long after Katie McVeigh went to bed and slept the sleep of the righteous.

The sun was shining brightly into her room on the following morning, when the inspector's daughter was awakened by hearing her father in the kitchen below, talking in loud and jubilant tones. She sprang out of bed, and, hastily dressing, ran downstairs.

The kitchen was full of police, in the midst of whom stood her father, with a face beaming with delight.

"Good morning, my lass," cried McVeigh. "Here, men, have another drink all round to my daughter's health. Katie, my dear, you shall have the handsomest silk dress that money can buy. Ah! you may well look amazed, child," he continued, noting her perplexed expression, "but I have good news for you. We have captured the thieves who have been troubling us so long, and have got back Lady Milchester's jewels."

"And all through you, Miss Katie," said one of the men.

"Through me?" the girl ejaculated.

"Yes, through you," returned her father. "Are you not curious to learn who are the thieves?"

"They're no people that I know, are they, father?"

"You know them pretty well, I think," laughed the inspector. "Let me see," running his eyes over a piece of paper in his hand, "there's Miss Laura Blake and her invalid brother—and he's no more an invalid than I am—they're great pals of yours, aren't they?"

"You're joking, surely, father," said Katie, turning pale.

"Then," pursued the inspector, "there's Doctor Urmston and Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Pellingham."

Yes; the thieves were trapped at last, thanks to the vanity of one of their number. Had Mrs. Pellingham forborne to wear Lady Milchester's ring until she had left Sheldrake behind her, they would in all probability have gone scot-free. Laura Blake's ruse of upsetting the table to distract Katie's attention from the ring, and subsequent fainting-fit, were very clever impromptus and thoroughly deceived the inspector's daughter; but Katie's father was not so easily blinded, and, on hearing his daughter's tale, promptly obtained search warrants.

Much amusement was caused at the trial of the prisoners—Mrs. Pellingham turned Queen's evidence and divulged the whole plot—by Inspector McVeigh relating how assiduously Laura Blake waited on Algy while the search of the house was being carried on.

"Please don't make more noise than you can help," she had said. "My brother is very bad to-night. Yes, Algy darling, I am coming." And she had tended him devotedly.

But when it was suggested that "Algy darling" should be moved, so that the bed and mattress on which he lay might undergo an examination, and she found that pleading, and prayers, and tears were without avail, she became a veritable wild-cat and raved like a mad woman. And no wonder; securely packed in the centre of poor Algy's flock mattress were the Milchester jewels. Only a ring, the one Mrs. Pellingham had worn, was missing.

The doctor, who was proved beyond doubt to be a fully qualified medical man, was regarded by the judge as the ringleader of the gang, and, accordingly, ten years' penal servitude was meted out to him; Laura Blake got five; while Algy and Redge each

received a sentence of eighteen months' hard labour. Mrs. Pellingham had, of course, a free pardon.

Old Lady Milchester was so overjoyed on again receiving her jewels that she took Ella Pellingham under her special protection, and has promised to give her a sum of money, when Reginald comes out of prison, to make them a fresh start where the story of their crime is unknown.

"But tell me," said the old lady, "tell me how you knew where I had secured my jewels."

"Why, Algy Blake was reconnoitring from the big sycamore tree just outside your window, and the moon shone fully upon you. Don't you remember that you hid them by moonlight?"

The inhabitants of Sheldrake presented Inspector McVeigh with a handsome testimonial, "for," said they, "he is to be excused for not suspecting a fashionable doctor and an apparently helpless cripple of being burglars in disguise."

Never, perhaps, was a plot of wholesale robbery better arranged; Laura Blake's praise of the doctor procured him an entrance into the best houses, and his practised eyes soon noted where the valuables were kept.

However, "all's well that ends well," and nobody was dissatisfied with the turn things had taken except the firm of Parsons and Rodgers. The principals of it grumbled exceedingly, for though they rejoiced mightily in the overthrow of their successful rival, they did not like to be called "doddering old idiots," an epithet which was applied to them pretty frequently; and many sarcastic references were made in their presence to Algy Blake's weak back.

For this they revenged themselves by declining to subscribe to the inspector's testimonial. And I think that they are so well liked in Sheldrake that a clever young doctor would find a good opening there. But, mind you, his character must be unimpeachable and bear the most searching investigation. The good folk of Sheldrake have had a lesson.

Dr. Alington's Retirement.

Two years ago, when Mr. Henry Alington, of the Bengal Civil Service, took his modest pension and retired as a comparatively young man, his case supplied a text on which well-intending seniors preached a good many homilies to junior members of the service. Some of his own contemporaries also and others found in it a not unwelcome sanction for the dislike and perhaps distrust which they in common with many Anglo-Indians felt for officials of exclusive and unsociable habits. For though he resigned his appointment Alington had had little choice of doing otherwise. The black mark was against his name; his career, which seemed to be moving steadily to a brilliant consummation, had been suddenly marred. After he had been nominated to take charge of the important district of Chahpore, the appointment was with much abruptness cancelled, on the ground, as it leaked out, that he was discovered to be heavily indebted to a native banker and contractor of the locality. It was undesirable to give room for even suspicion that influence could be brought to bear on the administration. Though it had not been shown that his debts arose from participation in the great mining boom which had recently collapsed, there was too much reason to conclude that they did. The rule which prohibits civil servants from speculation needed vindication, and the authorities were determined not to trifle with its infraction. The circumstances did not warrant his immediate compulsory retirement, but official views were clearly shown in his appointment to a pestilential region among the islands in the delta of the river. Here, discharging duties usually intrusted to officers junior to himself, he remained for three years, traversing endless waterways in the boat which was his dwelling, and rarely meeting a European. At the first possible moment, knowing that the door of promotion was definitely shut against him, he applied to retire on his pension and his career in India closed.

There was, as has been said, plenty of moralizing on the subject. Sentimental people talked of the vulgarity of the

temptation to which he succumbed, and of the singular promise of distinction which had been cut off. But the case was always regarded as a simple one. All the same it was not quite so simple as it seemed. Hear the story.

From his first European furlough he brought back a wife with whom he had fallen in love while still at his crammer's. The station to which he was sent on his return lay in one of those remote planting districts, where not only is there no available society, but where no effort or expense can materially vary the monotony. It suited Alington excellently. The absence of distractions produced the leisure which enabled him to portion out his day between official and other intellectual work. His bachelor habits, that is to say, were in great measure continued, for he was by inclination a student, he was ambitious of distinction in the service, and what is usually called recreation attracted him seldom. Thus it was that their married life from its commencement came to take on, as its apparently natural state, the condition of being quiet and home-staying. When after four years they moved to another district, certain differences in their dispositions finding for the first time room to exert themselves, ran somewhat violently into collision. The new station was an up-country town famous for its annual race meet. It was a kind of secondary administrative centre where a considerable number of civil officials were collected; military cantonments were close by, and something in the way of entertainment was going forward every day. Alington assumed without question that their life here would go on as it had begun. By this time they had a boy. It seemed more than ever desirable to devote himself to professional advancement, and with this object his intention was that they should practically seclude themselves, restricting as far as was possible their appearances at public or private gatherings to those occasions when his official position made his attendance necessary. That was the husband's view. Will you now judge how the sort of life at which he aimed was likely to satisfy the wife? Julia had been brought up in one of the families where the female members regard their social duties as the primary occupation to which their time is to be devoted. Do you think it natural that she should be very content with solitary afternoons and evenings of domestic dullness? In a well-to-do household she had been the specially

spoilt child. Was it probable that she would quietly forego enjoyment when it was ready to her hand? Possibly you may say that many a woman under such circumstances has foregone her own desires. Yes, but poor Julia was not one of those. She had no power to forego anything that she liked even if she wished to try; and she was far from wishing to try. How she had endured the dreary years in their lonely bungalow she never well understood. There had been constant complaining, but complaint could not procure diversion where no means for it existed. Here, however, all was different. That constant round of pleasure which she used to suppose made the life of Englishwomen in India was in actual movement about her. And she was expected to shun it! Some passionate scenes between the two occurred and recurred. Alington stood out for the absolutely quiet life. He would not give way and fancied himself strong for not doing so. His own aims, you see, were meritorious, and there are men to whom that argument seems strong enough to overbear everything else. Julia, on the other hand, conscious that she meant no harm, claimed the right to share the life that others of her position led. After a period of conflict a kind of compromise gradually established itself. Alington stayed in the house working, and his wife went into society alone. He used to warn her angrily, reproaching her with neglect of the child, whom she left wholly to her European maid. But scolding did not make her love her home the more. Her passion for going out was suffered to grow by the consciousness that all cause for restraint was practically removed. There was no necessity that this should lead to a catastrophe. But unhappily it did. Eight or nine years after their married life began it ended.

Of how Julia spent the next year or two it is not well to speak. The case was tried in England, and there, after an interval, she married again. It was another Indian official whom she married, a rather smart young man, said to be fond of horses and a little extravagant, and a year or two junior to herself.

It was a relief to Alington when this occurred. He had, till then, been careful to keep himself informed of the path she was following. Let us hope that this anxiety was a sign of recognition on his side that he was in some measure answerable for what had befallen her—that he had not done his part by Julia.

He had, indeed, been miserably weak. A man may not renounce, as he had tried to do, his responsibility for his wife. In allowing her to be constantly alone in public places he had made the way of evil easier for her. Wrapped in his own virtue he had stood aside and let her go. As a matter of fact something which occurred afterwards showed that he did realize this, that he was conscious that at least he might have attempted more. Still it was now too late to do anything, and he quieted himself with the reflection that nothing could have averted the catastrophe. However strongly he had acted, the result, he told himself, must have been the same. In our troubles, we often comfort ourselves much as we comfort our friends in theirs, by the use of well-sounding phrases without being too sure of their truth. Anyhow, Alington could be certain of one thing, the great wrong that had been done to himself, and if he had been guilty of shortcomings perhaps he felt that he had also paid for them.

Men of reserved habits, when anything occurs that embitters their lives, do not as a rule become less reserved. They usually retire more than ever within themselves. That is what Alington did. His duty placed him in some measure in contact with other men; but such time as was not needed for official work he spent alone in somewhat less rigid labour, which was his form of diversion. Several of his printed papers attracted attention; once or twice he was consulted by members of council, and from time to time was employed in special ways. His reports, if long, had more than customary value. In the ordinary official routine so much energy was often found to be an inconvenience and in earlier days had drawn down more than one rebuke. But this could not happen now. He was becoming recognized as an authority on certain questions and no more snubs came his way. In departmental affairs even men of active brain must under some circumstances be tolerated.

In 1890-1891 a strange fever raged in Bengal. It was the gold fever. One spot where evidence existed of ancient workings was exploited, a syndicate acquired it, and after some operations sold it to a new company. The shares ran to a premium, and at once the presidency blazed with speculation. Every tract of barren land in Chota Nagpore became a trap for catching money if it produced none, and fresh companies sprang daily into life. The infatuation spared no class, or creed, or race.

While the tide of rising prices flowed, all seemed to go well. Every man's credit sufficed to borrow on gold shares and hundreds did borrow. But after the full tide came the ebb. At the highest figures what was known as the public bought the shares. After the public has been so fortunate as to acquire large amounts of any security, its market value often declines rather suddenly. Quotations ceased to rise, gold shares for a day or two were described as heavy, and then prices fell like a boulder on a mountain slope. Money-lenders, alarmed for their security, called up loans, and in a trice the unwonted speculator, whirled off his feet, found himself spinning in the eddies of distress. The government, not without cause, became anxious about its own servants. A little dabbling was unimportant, but if any officer in charge of funds had been in a hurry to be rich a sudden fall in values might produce the circumstances that can make temptation overpoweringly strong. It seemed wise by a show of activity to oppose the maximum of difficulty to the commission of irregularities, and a certain amount of extra inspection was decided on. Alington's services being available, part of the duty was confided to him.

He had visited several stations and only Bajgunge remained. There were reasons why this place stood over to the last. The ostensible one was that a cousin of his, a clergyman quartered there, was temporarily absent, and if a little delay were given might return in time to receive him. There was a stronger reason. We sometimes defer disagreeable things hoping that chance may avert them wholly. Mr. Macintosh, the officer whose accounts would be inspected at Bajgunge, Alington had never met. But he happened to be Julia's husband.

When in the middle of a broiling day Alington arrived at his cousin's bungalow the servant said the padre sahib would not be at home till dinner-time. He had a bath and breakfast and went to the government office. His meeting with Macintosh was necessarily unpleasant, and not less so that his coming was unexpected. The rest of the day was spent at the safe or over ledgers and papers. On returning to dinner he had some books brought to the house. Some links of proof had to be traced out, but he knew well enough that he had discovered a clever trick whereby the accounts were falsified by over 30,000 rupees.

"A nice pair," he said to himself as he dressed for dinner

There was satisfaction in making this discovery. Did it not confirm his theory that Julia had that leaning to evil which nothing which he could have done would have diverted? Did it not prove that he himself was in no way responsible for the trouble that had fallen on her? No longer very young and not in want, she had cast in her lot with a man capable of theft. He was good-looking, probably showy, and what did a little dishonesty matter? The chain of ideas does not perhaps strike you as very logical. No, but it was logical enough for a man to reassure himself with. "She knew what sort of a fellow he was. A nice pair," he said again.

Let us be quite clear as to what was impending. Defalcating officials may not be criminally prosecuted, but after expulsion from the service which they have disgraced, they are unlikely to lead creditable careers. Most commonly they cannot be expelled from the service. Before any action can be taken, they place themselves beyond the reach of human orders and the operation of the Queen's pleasure, and a kindly jury with a few customary words draws, as it were, a decent curtain round them to keep off eyes that would look too closely. In either case have you any doubt as to what in this instance would become of the wretched wife? In disgraced poverty, or with disgraced widowhood added, was a passionate, pleasure-loving creature, such as she, likely to keep to that strait path which the sober and careful so often miss? Julia had no strength to face need or self-denial of any sort. She was still handsome and bright. Whatever were the husband's fate the position would place her in temptations that she had no power to resist. For a time she had been living respectably, but when the exposure was made it was not to be doubted what it would bring about. It would for a certainty complete her moral ruin.

But it was already complete, Alington tried to argue; complete in fact if not in appearance.

"A nice pair," he said again.

The cousins had had dinner and, after their talk and cheroots, were going to their rooms. Alington had said good-night and then, as if by an afterthought, he added:

"Oh, by the way, Frank, I ought to ask. How is she going on? You know."

Frank could not have guessed that what he was going to say

would stab his cousin like a dagger. The main incidents of that married life which ended so sadly were known in the family, but very little beyond those incidents. The cleric spoke in an acquired and rather intoned voice, he kept his chin protruded in a manner that laymen seldom adopt, and he had a habit of constantly attributing occurrences to the direct action of the divine government. Such things usually irritated Alington. Just now he did not notice them.

"I'm glad you asked, old man," Frank said. "I did not like to mention her. I know little of her personally, but from what I hear, things are going on perhaps better than you could have hoped."

"And the man?" Alington said rather disdainfully. In all relations of life Macintosh, he thought, must be a contemptible creature.

"Oh, he takes very good care of her."

Alington had not expected such a reply. He would rather not have gone on with the subject, and remained silent, looking at the ground.

Frank misinterpreted this silence. He fancied that his cousin, moved by being so near the woman he had once loved, shrank from avowing that she had still any interest for him.

"I think your anxiety for her so noble," he said. "I can really reassure you. She's in good hands. They say Macintosh thought her a widow when he married, but at any rate now though of course she is not received quite as other ladies are, he sticks to her splendidly. He is always with her wherever she goes. And then, you know, there is no doubt his character is full of force. I don't mean that he is very lofty in his aims. I'm afraid he is not—but he is resolute and self-willed. He seems very kind to her, but his good sense tells him what is best for her, and somehow he takes care that it is done. For instance, I was told no longer ago than yesterday that she only keeps an ayah, yet her two children are excellently looked after. She does an immense amount for them herself. I know, of course, what sort of woman she is; but depend on it, she is growing better and gaining control over herself. If Macintosh is spared and she can continue to look up to him she will in time become a different creature. It's just a chance, a grand chance the Lord is giving her. Harry, my dear fellow, I am so thankful to be able to tell

you this. I see how you feel. I can't tell you how I honour you for it. Everything, you see, is worked for the best. By God's grace she has been once more rescued from temptation, and this man may be the saving of her."

We will not speculate as to the thoughts that occupied Alington's mind through that long close night, as he lay sleepless under the punkah. The next morning he appeared rather early at the office, but Macintosh, pale though composed, was already in his room.

"There is something in these accounts which is not very clear to me," Alington said drily. "No doubt everything is in order, but I should be glad of an explanation. Unfortunately I cannot go further into matters personally, as I am called away suddenly on special duty. I am leaving you a memorandum on the points about which I wish for information. You will be good enough to write to me, and let me understand what these figures represent. In a week's time I shall be at the seat of government. You will address me there."

He left, doing no more. After two days Macintosh received from a firm of solicitors in Calcutta a cheque for thirty-five thousand rupees. No intimation accompanied it as to who the remitter was, but as he had telegraphed urgently to more than one relative, this seemed to be the reply. He very easily persuaded himself that an aunt who would never acknowledge the loan, and who, as he might have known, could by no means have afforded it, was his secret benefactor; and the money was too welcome for its source to be much questioned. The accounts were worked into shape, and he sure that the required explanation was duly sent to the inspecting officer corroborated by the certificates of one or two civilians from other stations, testifying that they had examined his treasury and found the cash to correspond with the accounts.

When, a few months later, Alington was appointed to the district of Chahpore, the authorities were in some way apprised that he was in debt to a local contractor and money-lender. The man did business both in the district and in Calcutta. Possibly one of his competitors, knowing of the loan and apprehensive that a creditor of an influential official might have advantages over himself, may have been the informant. An exalted personage in Calcutta, in an interview, put the point to Alington,

who denied nothing, but declined to say definitely how the debt originated. The money was needed for his private concerns, he said. It was not unnatural if this was interpreted to imply that he had been involved more or less directly in the share speculation which has been mentioned. At any rate his indebtedness was shown to have arisen at the particular time when that speculation collapsed. His appointment was cancelled, and we know what followed.

With the vanishing rupee and the boy to educate in England, he had saved nothing. But when he ultimately retired, most, if not all, of his debt had been discharged.

Macintosh has risen in the service, and will rise further. When he heard of Alington's supersession he said little, but that he was an absurdly over-rated man, infinitely less acute than he was represented.

As for Alington, perhaps you will point out that he sought to atone for one wrong by committing another. I am not taking his part. He was a clever man, but a weak one. I merely said that his case was not so simple as it seemed.

E. C. HAMLEY.

Whom the Queen delighteth to Honour.

SIR HENRY IRVING, JULY, 1895.

OUR loved Sir Henry, true and loyal knight,
Exalted by the Lady of the Land
As champion of our art, to win the fight
And bear the mead of honour from her hand !
No, not for self-applause or vulgar pride
Thy forehead shines beneath the victor's crown,
But for thy comrades' sake—no more denied
Their portion 'mongst the heirs of fair renown.
Upborne by them, as on the warrior's shield,
In Britain's youth, the leader of the free
Was raised in triumph from the hard-fought field,
What greater glory yet remains to thee ?

Our hearts of island oak thy power hath won
To live with Shakespeare and with Tennyson !

EMILIA AYLMER GOWING.

The Dramatic Season 1894-5.

THE dramatic season which is just over presents one of the most curiously unsatisfactory pages in the annals of theatrical London. We use the word "curiously" advisedly, for notwithstanding that our stage has probably never before possessed so many actors and actresses of real ability, and that they have obtained ample opportunities of showing their versatility, owing to the unusual number of plays that have been produced during the past year, it is only in a very few cases in the higher walks of the drama that genuine success has been attained. It is regrettable to have to record that though, throughout the whole period, our theatres have been given up almost entirely to the plays of English authors, never has there been a more depressing series of productions than that which has just come to an end. In a year in which there has been, we think, no single representation of any of his plays, the Ibsen craze may, we hope, be said to be practically over and done with for good and all. It has, however, left many perceptible traces on the work of our own playwrights, some of them highly beneficial, but many of them the reverse. To the great Norwegian—for undeniably great he is in point of intellect, much as we may dislike the dreary nastiness of the major portion of his work—we are indebted for the abolition of much of the purely theatrical and eminently unnatural from our stage; but the benefit we have derived therefrom has been in a great measure discounted by the impenetrable gloom, to say nothing of the squalor and degradation we have been forced to endure, not only in witnessing the wearisome productions of the plays of the master himself, in former years, but also in the works of so many of the dramatists of to-day, which are undeniably to be traced to his influence.

But it would be unfair to attribute to Ibsen alone all the ills from which we have been suffering in the shape of the numerous uninteresting and preposterous plays which have been given a hearing during the past season, and have, we fear, resulted so disastrously, if not for all, for many of the managers of our principal playhouses. Our theatres have, without exception, been suffering from an attack of the dismals, an epidemic which has

spread even to pantomime, and wiped out burlesque altogether. Each of our leading dramatists has given us at least one piece, but, save in one case, it cannot be said that the literature of the stage has in any way benefited thereby. At the same time it must be admitted that the few plays derived from foreign sources which have been presented have not contained any features of such merit as would make us wish to return to the interminable flood of adaptations from the French which deluged our stage a few years ago.

Beginning cheerfully with Mr. Sidney Grundy's brilliant if unequal "New Woman," and that really capital Adelphi drama, "The Fatal Card," one almost hoped that the season was going to be at any rate one which would afford amusement to audiences and profit to managers, but fate—and shall we say the managers themselves?—had willed that it should be otherwise, and we soon found ourselves hemmed in on all sides by gloom and depression, whether the play was intentionally grave or would-be gay. The woman with a past was rampant, and would in all probability be so still if she had not been partially effaced by Mr. Pinero's "Mrs. Ebbsmith," with her undeniable present, and Mr. Jones's shameless French hussy, who had not only a present but, judging from appearances, several futures. We have often been told that the modern playgoer wants realism, but though at one time vice and ugliness did arouse his curiosity to a certain extent, he soon sickened of their deadly dullness, and has, we fear, of late, shown his appreciation of their merits as a mainstay of an evening's entertainment, by discreetly staying away from the houses where the so-called problem plays have formed the staple of attraction. It is to be hoped that both managers and playwrights will profit by the painful experience of shocking business that has been the result, for there has been a succession of short runs at most theatres almost unprecedented in later years. That the days of long runs are over, for the present, there can be no doubt, and it cannot in any way be looked upon as a matter of regret; but at the same time one cannot help thinking that if better pieces had been placed upon the stage they would have met with greater favour, and have had longer lives than those which have fallen to the lot of the majority of the plays submitted to metropolitan audiences since last September.

We all know that the managers have had an unusual number

of foes to contend with during the last twelve months, in the shape of bad weather and rival entertainments, to say nothing of the heat and a general election at the end of it, which took people out of town earlier than usual. Without doubt they have been in a great measure affected by these causes ; but there have been other years in which it has frozen quite as hard outside the play-house without the effects of frost being so terribly visible on the stage, and to judge from recent proceedings the managers of rival shows have been even less successful than their legitimate brethren, and the real reason of failure must be sought for elsewhere. Either the public which used to support our theatres has ceased to take as great an interest in them as it did formerly, or it has not found sufficient food for entertainment within their doors.

It may be that by the lavish expenditure and admirable taste that have been bestowed on some of the productions of former years, the ideas of audiences have been raised to a higher standard and more is expected than used to be the case, but it is certainly not for want of notice being taken of the theatre, both by the press and society, that it has not thriven, for never before have actors individually and as a body been so freely advertised as at the present time. Every weekly paper has its theatrical columns, and a large number of those which are not professedly theatrical devote much of their space and the majority of their illustrations to the latest productions of the stage. Our leading critics are almost hysterical in their enthusiasm over the performances of whatever actress may be their pet at the moment, and give vent to it in columns of gush. It is true that in six months time they will most likely have given the unfortunate young lady a back seat in their affections, and have taken another in her stead, allowing their former *innamorata* no shred of talent with which to cover her. Only one thing is certain : she is either superhumanly perfect, or the absolute reverse, and after having raised her to a pinnacle of fame, to which she is unfortunately only too often unworthy to soar, they will not scruple to dash her down unmercifully and scatter the pavement with her gore. It may be a mere beginner, or an actress who has devoted all her life to her art, or it may be even a *café chantant* singer ; the same terms are used, the same allusions made to "her childlike simplicity," "her almost painful realism," or "her corn-coloured

hair," as the case may be. The "childlike simplicity" is probably due to nervousness, the "painful realism" more probably due to ugliness, and the "corn-coloured hair" most probably due to dye, but it is all one to them; gush they must and gush they do. But what is the result? Does it make the audiences at the theatre at which the siren is appearing larger? Judging from experience, we fear not.

It may be that in this very advertising and superabundant enthusiasm rests one of the causes of the great lack of interest in things theatrical which has become apparent of late with the outside public. Is it that they no longer place any faith in critics, and that they are tired and sick of the endless interviews with and reproductions of portraits of every one in any way connected with the theatre, from its highest lights down, one might almost say, to the call-boy, with which we have been so overwhelmed of late, and that they wish the stage and all its satellites at Jericho?

Rob the drama of some of its illusions and show even partially the wires that move the puppets and the glamour that ought to surround it is lost, and the very best acting becomes nothing more than the mouthing and grimacing of ordinary men and women, performed with a greater or less amount of ability, and ceases to produce the effect on the feelings it intends to do. Doubtless there is a certain section of society which takes a modified interest in the arrangement of the back drawing-room of Miss Snellicci's flat in the Tottenham Court Road, but we cannot help thinking that there is a much larger proportion of the public which would appreciate her efforts as an actress a great deal more if the article which describes the draperies which surround her mantelpiece did not at the same time inform them that she is the wife of an accountant and the mother of a large and thriving family. If we hear Ophelia ordering her shoulder of mutton and onion sauce before she starts for the theatre, we cannot be expected to be affected by her pathos in the same manner in which we should have been if she had come before us simply as an exquisite embodiment of the poet's fancy.

But it was not the merits or demerits of theatrical advertisement that it was intended to discuss here, but rather the present state of our theatres from the audience's point of view, and when

we say audience, we do not mean simply the people who fill the house, but those who are capable of appreciating a good play well acted, when they have the good fortune to see one. It is these people who have had cause to complain during the past season, for in very few cases has anything like a good *ensemble* been obtained. Even the Lyceum, where one expects to find everything done in the best style, has not been wholly exempt from the cruel dreariness that has reigned supreme. Certainly during some part of the time Sir Henry Irving has, in the Corporal Gregory Brewster of the "Story of Waterloo," given us one of the most finished studies of an old man that the modern stage in England has yet attained; a study, indeed, of such exquisite finish and accuracy that it will be always remembered as one of his finest impersonations. Never has he acted better or sunk his marked mannerisms so much, the whole performance showing how a really great artist can elevate an almost trivial theme to a position of the first importance. This season, too, has given us his "Don Quixote," a beautiful piece of acting, worthy of a better background, for never can the Don himself have had a more adequate representative, though little, unfortunately, can be said for acting of the minor characters of the piece or for the mangled version of Cervantes we were asked to accept as a play. But brilliant as his performance was in each case, it was not the production of either that was the event of the first importance in the past few months of the Lyceum's history. It was rather the "King Arthur" which took the lead and which was, as a whole, in spite of Mr. Forbes Robertson's ideal Lancelot, and in spite of the lavish, one might almost say loving, care that had been expended on the mounting, a distinct disappointment. We heard so much beforehand about the version that Mr. Comyns Carr was preparing, following the lines laid down by Sir Thomas Malory, in preference to those of Tennyson, that our hopes ran high, and we looked for a fitting representation of an inspiring and essentially English subject. But what did we find? An Arthur of Burne Jones and Irving, but certainly not of Malory, and a vision of the Holy Grail, resembling more than anything else the phantom manufactured of a turnip-lantern and a sheet with which we used to try and frighten the housemaid in the days of our youth.

But let us turn at once to the one performance which has given

us a perfect *ensemble*. If the ideal has been denied proper representation by our managers, the realistic has at any rate been given every chance in Mr. Hare's production of Mr. Pinero's latest play, "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith," at the Garrick. In this—the one satisfactory play of the year—everything was well done, from the superb acting of Mrs. Patrick Campbell as the heroine, to the grey flannel shirt worn by Mr. Aubrey Smith as the country parson. Mrs. Campbell's acting alone it is impossible to forget, but never had a star a better company to support her. In addition to this every detail even of the most minute description had been attended to both by playwright and manager, and the result was ample recompense for the thought and trouble that must have been devoted to it to bring it about. The servants were foreign, and for the first time we believe on our stage spoke their native tongue; the scene was a palace converted into an hotel, and it looked it; the leading lady did not scruple to wear the most hideously unbecoming evening dress that, it is to be hoped, has ever fallen to the lot of mortal woman, in order to suit the exigencies of the part; in fact, there was only one small blot apparent even to the most captious, and that was the wicked way in which Miss Ellis Jeffreys over-dressed the part she acted so admirably. Then there was Mr. Hare's Duke, played as only Mr. Hare can play such a part, and Mr. Forbes Robertson's masterly rendering of a most difficult and unsympathetic character, to say nothing of Mr. Aubrey Smith's excellent impersonation of the flannel-shirted parson before mentioned. If the main theme of the play was rather morbid, it is anyhow cheering to be able to chronicle that in the season of 1894-5 there was produced at any rate one play brilliantly conceived and written from start to finish, and acted in a manner it would be hard to beat on any stage. Perhaps the surrounding gloom made us inclined to think more highly of this one gleam of light, but we do not think this was the case; and a play which had to undergo the keenest criticism and much inevitable comparison came through the ordeal triumphant.

In saying that this was the only play produced during the season by which our literature would be in any way benefited we were perhaps a trifle hasty, as exception should also be made in this respect in favour of Mr. Henry James's "Guy Domville," which although in no way fitted for the stage of to-day, was

universally allowed to be from a literary standpoint far above the average of ordinary dramatic writing.

Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, an unequal dramatist at the best of times, has never shown himself more so than in his two latest productions, neither of which had sufficient merit to make amends for the ponderous names with which he chose to burden them. "The Case of Rebellious Susan," by far the best of the two, was entirely spoiled by the clumsy nature of its ill-drawn comic relief; but although it was consequently ruined from an artistic point of view, it contained several well thought out characters and scenes, which gave the actors some excellent opportunities, of which they availed themselves, and, moreover, it retained the attention of the audience to the finish. Would that we could say as much for the same author's other work, "The Triumph of the Phillistines, &c.," a play with only one redeeming feature, in which an entire ignorance of the ways and customs of ordinary life was manifested, of which one did not think even Mr. Jones was capable. The redeeming feature alluded to above was the finely-drawn if repulsive French model, which gave Miss Juliette Nesville such a good opportunity of showing what a really excellent actress she is when furnished with a part in any way worthy of her powers. Though not intentionally a one part piece, what the performance would have been like had this character fallen into other hands it is really terrible to picture; for the remainder of the caste one would have no feeling other than that of intense pity.

"The New Woman," referred to before, was the only new play coming from Mr. Sidney Grundy's pen with which we were favoured, and although it was not by any means a great or convincing piece of work, it furnished good parts and smart speeches for such capable performers as Miss Rose Leclercq, Miss Winifred Emery and Mr. Cyril Maude, and moreover enjoyed a very considerable success. Mr. Carton and Mr. Haddon Chambers, both of whom have at different times given us good plays, have not, it is to be feared, in any way increased their reputations or embellished the literature of the country with "The Home Secretary" or "John-a-Dreams," though each piece has secured a fair measure of public approval. It is to be hoped that Mr. Carton will not forsake the sphere of domestic comedy in which he is so admirable, as there are so few dramatists capable of making a homely subject interesting, and he

scarcely seems so much at his ease in the field of melodrama, upon the borders of which he has encroached in his last piece. Mr. Haddon Chambers succeeded far better with melodrama pure and simple in the "Fatal Card" than he did in his later and more ambitious play, but it can be said of the latter that, though not wholly successful, it showed a marked improvement in style on his former efforts in the same direction. "The Derby Winner," the only spectacular drama in any way capable of being considered as a serious rival to the Adelphi piece, was an excellent thing in its way, and afforded splendid opportunities to Mrs. John Wood of showing her ability in the rôle of the always impossible stage duchess, who must be a first cousin to the stage Irishman, now happily no more, so little does she resemble anything that is human, and also gave Miss Alma Stanley scope for showing unsuspected power in the part of the humorous female villain she played so well.

After these half-dozen or so productions have been enumerated there is nothing left but a hideous chaos of musical comedy, feeble comic opera and farce. As some of the first-mentioned have been remarkably successful in this season of failures, they shall be dealt with before either of the two older forms of entertainment out of which they have been evolved. The former home of real burlesque, the Gaiety, the very name of which conjures up fond memories of Nelly Farren, Edward Terry and Kate Vaughan, and later on of poor Fred Leslie, after a struggle to maintain the old form of entertainment with "Don Juan" and the ill-judged revival of "Little Jack Sheppard," has at last yielded to the popular demand, and musical farce holds sway here as elsewhere, and it may be added with the greatest success. "The Shop Girl," if it does not suit the palate of certain cavillers, has at any rate hit the public taste, principally, we imagine, on the merits of its cleverly-executed Japanese dance and those of a song, which shall be nameless, borrowed from the music halls. It must be added, however, that it has introduced to this class of work two young artists singularly well fitted for it in the persons of Mr. Seymour Hicks and Miss Ada Reeve. Of "Gentleman Joe," a piece we believe enjoying a huge success upon the sole merits of Mr. Arthur Roberts' impersonation of a hansom cabman, there is little to be said except that Mr. Arthur Roberts is, with his seemingly inexhaustible fund of genuine wit and

unrivalled impromptu, as amusing as ever, and that when he is on the stage all is life and laughter, and when he is not, all is gloom and balderdash. "An Artist's Model," though perhaps containing some better writing than either of the other two, is, if possible, even more incoherent, and only makes us think how much better Mr. Hayden Coffin used to sing than he does now, and that we very much prefer Miss Letty Lind when she dances more and sings less. "Dandy Dick Whittington," in which Miss May Yohé performed, should, we suppose, be also enumerated among the musical farces.

Though it is greatly to be regretted that pieces of this type have completely extinguished the sacred lamp of burlesque proper, one cannot blame managers for producing them while the public will flock to see them. So much cannot, it is feared, be said for "His Excellency" and "The Chieftain," the two sole representatives of comic opera that have been given. In spite of the quartette of old and tried Savoy favourites, engaged, we were told, at enormous salaries and headed by Mr. George Gro-smith, which was included in the caste of the first-named, and in spite of the fact that Miss Florence St. John, still without rival as a delightful singer, possessing also a sense of humour, was prima donna in the second, neither piece found lasting favour with the public, and only proved once again that Mr. W. S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan when apart are—well—not so good by any means as they were in partnership.

In farce the first place has been taken by "Vanity Fair," a play which has met with some success, principally owing to the really comic acting of Mrs. John Wood as the heroine, an ex-music-hall singer, and Mr. Arthur Cecil as her only friend. It is, however, disappointing, as coming from the pen of Mr. G. W. Godfrey, who appears to have got a little behind the times, and from whom better things were to be expected. "The Passport," though produced late in the year, calls for mention as rather above the average, an amusing idea being well worked out without being overdone, and Miss Gertrude Kingston's impersonation of yet another stupid woman being particularly clever. Farce has also been presented at Toole's, "Thoroughbred;" Terry's, "The Blue Boar" and "An Innocent Abroad," and at the Comedy "The Prude's Progress," to say nothing of the several abortive performances that have taken place in the theatres at

the eastern end of the Strand, and the seemingly everlasting "Charley's Aunt," which is, to quote the play-bills, "still running."

Of course there have been several revivals, as there always must be in a season of moderate successes. These it is not intended to discuss here, though it would be unmannerly to pass without comment the variable "Fedora" of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, or the delightful "Two Gentlemen of Verona," at Daly's, which gave us a chance of seeing what can be done with a play hitherto considered almost unactable, and also of seeing Miss Ada Rehan's Julia, a charming addition to her gallery of sketches of Shakespearian heroines. For this and for the fact of Miss Rehan's Helena, one can almost forgive Mr. Daly for his terrible "Midsummer Night's Dream," which seems more like a nightmare, with its pantomime fairies, tawdry panorama, high-heeled Oberon and fearsome Theseus. It seems ungracious to be over severe on a manager who, though till lately a stranger to our shores, has done so much towards giving the present generation of playgoers an opportunity of seeing several of Shakespeare's plays well acted and staged, but we did not expect this of him, and it rather shakes our faith.

The foreign invasion at the end of the season has given us opportunities of renewing our acquaintance with some of the best artists of the continent, as well as seeing some strangers and being able to admire their great merits without at the same time feeling, as used to often be the case, their unmeasurable superiority over our own players. Indeed it is in the admirable all-round acting, that has to a great extent been the rule of late where it used to be the exception, that the only steady advance has been made in things dramatic during the last year; and with this gleam of hope, which leads us to expect better things in the future, let us put an end to our catalogue of complaints.

GUY T. LITTLE.

A Fair Hindoo.

By JOHN H. WILLMER.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WILD MEN OF THE WOODS.

BEFORE sunrise next morning Vincent was up and on his way to his own tent to see if Devaki was awake. He found she was, and, moreover, in conversation with Ali outside the tent door. He heard Ali say, as he approached from behind the tent:

"I can guess what has brought you: to be with your white-faced lover. By Allah! if I thought you——"

"Peace; I'll not have such language. As yet I am not yours—not till you have shown my friends into Yakoob's den."

"I know—I know. But—mind how you treat me! If you play me false, I'll——"

"Hound! You insult me. Because your word is not worth a cowrie, you judge mine to be the same? Be careful, or my sahib will have you kicked out of this."

"What is it, Devaki?" asked Vincent, coming forward.

"I was scolding this man," was the prompt reply. But she did not add her reason for scolding Ali. She was afraid to.

"You are up very early," said Vincent to Ali.

"It is wise to do so, because, if we have any enemies, we can be beforehand. Sahib agrees with me, I'm sure, for he, too, is an early riser."

The sarcasm in the speaker's voice did not escape detection, but Vincent reasoned it was wiser not to notice it.

"My profession obliges me to rouse at any hour," replied the doctor. "This morning I awoke early, being anxious to push on."

"Then rouse the men, sahib; they still sleep."

"There! That's the bugle!" exclaimed Devaki.

"So it is," replied Vincent. "Come, Devaki, we'll have something to eat."

Ali stood still for a moment, an angry look in his face, as he saw Devaki take Vincent's hand in hers. He muttered a deep curse, then hurried away to partake of his breakfast.

"Do you know, Devaki," said Vincent as they stood for a moment, hand in hand, inside the tent, "I heard what Ali had to say to you, but I deemed it best to keep quiet. Devaki, you have

promised yourself to me: you must therefore marry *me*, and not Ali."

She withdrew her hand from his and replied:

"Then must I return to Yakoob, sahib."

"Why?"

"I have promised Ali."

"You have promised Ali! And what of your promise to me?"

Do you love *me*, Devaki, or that man?"

Devaki's eyes grew dim.

"Do you love me?" repeated Vincent.

The girl answered in an almost inaudible voice:

"No."

Then she fled out of the tent and ran to some distance and hid herself in the woods. Vincent saw the direction she took, but did not follow her, for he was feeling sick at heart. He partook of little food that morning, and hastened away to Hoyles to tell him how Devaki had treated him. Hoyles had nothing much of a soothing nature to say to Vincent, who had to be satisfied with: "Wait till we have captured Yakoob; then I'll send Ali about his business."

The bugles now sounded the "*Fall in*," and the men got into their places ready to march. But the order to do so was not given. Ali was not present to show the way. Devaki, too, was missing. Fearing something wrong, Hoyles asked Vincent to go in search of Ali, but that individual now put in his appearance.

"Sahib," he cried excitedly, "Devaki has been carried off!"

"Where?" asked Hoyles.

"By whom?" demanded Vincent.

"Where, I cannot tell," replied Ali. "But I am of opinion the Ghonds have captured her."

"Heavens!" cried Hoyles.

"You need well be afraid, sahib, for if she be not recovered within a couple of hours, her head will be decorating the floor of some temple."

"But what makes you think she has been carried off?" asked Vincent, hoping Ali had no grounds for his suspicion.

"I saw Devaki, sahib, rush out of your tent and hide in the woods. Half-an-hour passed and she did not return; then I went in search of her. I followed the track she left in the soft dust; then, sahib, to my surprise I saw the marks of other feet.

I followed up the marks till I came to a tree where Devaki must have seated herself. Here were evident signs of a struggle, but no Devaki."

Hoyles, on receipt of this news, was undecided how to act. To delay was death to Helen, and yet how could he push on without an effort to rescue Devaki? Ali, however, came to his assistance and settled the question thus: he, Vincent and five soldiers were to go in search of Devaki, while Hoyles was to march forward with the troops—straight on till their further progress was barred by a river flowing through the woods. Ali was confident he would meet Hoyles there, without much delay, after having recovered Devaki.

This arrangement being agreed to, the bugles blared out and the troops moved forward. Vincent and five native soldiers followed Ali to where Devaki had been last seen.

"Here are some marks," said Ali, pointing out to Vincent the impressions made by Devaki's feet in the soft earth. A little further on, Ali halted and said:

"Here is where the Ghonds followed her."

"How do you make that out?" asked Vincent. "I can see no other marks here."

"The Ghonds are clever people, sahib. They have trod, one by one, in the imprint of Devaki's feet; but can you not distinguish toemarks?"

"I can."

"Devaki had on shoes."

"I see. You are a clever fellow, Ali. Hold! I see what appears to be toes on both sides of the feet."

"Right, sahib. The captors returned this way. Now let us disturb these leaves about here. See! Here are footmarks."

"And here!" cried a soldier to the right.

"And here!" from another to the left.

"I thought so," exclaimed Ali. "Sahib, we have to deal with men of cunning. Now which track would you advise us to take?"

"Well, I can't say. Let it be the one to the right."

"Be it so. I'll take the one to the left, and you" (to a native soldier) "take this, leading straight in front. The rest of you remain here. Now listen, sahib, and you. You follow the steps, and if any of you have the luck to trace them for fifty yards, then stop till we join you."

"But how are we to know who is on the right track?"

"You'll know soon enough, sahib, if you chance to take the wrong road. Now let us separate."

Vincent traced the marks for a good twenty yards through bushes, &c.; then he turned sharply to the left, still following the footprints; again to the left and—he was back at the place of starting. Ali was already there.

"Do you understand me now, sahib?" he asked laughing.

"I do," replied Vincent. "By George! I never came across such cunning before."

"And if I mistake not, you will come across yet more. But don't let us waste time talking. Let us follow the track the soldier has taken, for his is the true one."

They advanced about fifty paces into the woods when they met the soldier sitting on a fallen tree, waiting for them. Ali took up the task of tracking, and they advanced swiftly for a couple of hundred yards or so. Then Ali came to a halt. There was not a trace of footprints anywhere.

"I told you, sahib," said he, "they would do something else to throw pursuers off."

"Can't you guess what they have done this time?"

Ali shook his head.

"Here is a bow and some arrows," said a soldier, examining something under a tree.

Ali rushed forward to examine them. Then he looked up the tree and laughed. "I have it, sahib!" he exclaimed. "I have it."

"What, Ali?"

"These Ghonds are cunning, sahib. It had struck me that, to throw off their pursuers, the wild men had climbed this tree, by means of that branch there, nearly touching the ground. But I was puzzled to discover how they had managed about Devaki. The finding of this bow has shown me how they got over the difficulty, and, too, where they alighted."

"Explain yourself."

"Sahib, the bows and arrows were found on the ground here. I naturally looked into the tree to see from where they had fallen."

"And saw ——?"

"That thick branch overhead barked in two places."

"I don't understand yet."

"Because you have not lived long enough in India to know

the habits of the wild men. I'll tell you what they did: they tied a swing."

"A swing?"

"Yes. They chose that high branch that the rope might be long—in fact, that it should swing within seizing distance of that huge rock there. Devaki was placed in the swing and let go. A man on that rock caught her. That is how they have got her across. This bow must have been dropped by one of them, no one seeing it fall. It will be of further use to us, sahib. Your rifles make too great a noise, the arrow carries death silently. Come, sahib, we'll inspect the ground on that side of the rock. I thought so. Here are the footprints again. We can go along much more quickly now."

About mid-day they halted and partook of a hasty meal, then once more they advanced. The business of tracking was tedious, for the wild men knew a number of ways of causing their pursuers to be "at fault." Ali, however, though it took him some time to work out the problems placed before him, was a clever fellow and quite a match for the Ghonds. Time after time he hit the track, and at length, when it was getting dark, he was up with them. He went forward alone to reconnoitre, and returned in about a quarter of an hour with the information that the men numbered twenty—armed with bows and arrows and knives.

"Did you see Devaki?" asked Vincent.

"I did. She was lying on the ground, bound. The men were discussing what to do with her. And I heard one man—I know a little of their language—say that to-morrow would be the full moon and then they would sacrifice the girl and not before."

"Why do they want to kill her?"

"I gathered from their conversation, sahib, that they have had ill luck, lately, in the chase, and they believe a human sacrifice will propitiate their god, who they think is angry, for some reason or other, with them."

"Well, Ali, are we to make a dash for it?"

"No, sahib. You will rush to your death if you do. These men can fight. They are not to be despised. My plan, sahib, is not formed yet. When I see what they are going to do with Devaki for the night, then I'll advise you. Meanwhile, sahib, you stay here with these men. I'll climb one of those trees there and watch all that takes place in the camp of the wild men."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VINCENT AND ALI SUCCEED IN RESCUING DEVAKI.

ABOUT eight o'clock Ali returned.

"They have stretched themselves out on the ground, sahib, to sleep, and they will sleep soundly, for they have eaten their fill of some wild animals they have killed."

"What have they done with Devaki?"

"She is lying, bound hand and foot, on the ground."

"The scoundrels! She'll die if they leave her like that."

"Leave her they will, sahib. I saw one man mounted guard over her."

"How long will it be before they are all fast asleep?"

"About an hour we should give them."

It was a long and anxious hour—slowly, slowly the minutes went by. Vincent remembered another night when with equal slowness the hours crept on: that night on which he had snatched Devaki from the grave. Would this night see another such rescue? "It will!" cried Vincent in answer to his own thoughts. "Or I too will follow Devaki to the grave."

Many were the thoughts that came crowding in upon his brain as he lay on the ground gazing up at a tiny star visible through a small break in the foliage. Ali's cry, "It is time," came as a relief, and he sprang nimbly to his feet.

"Sahib," said Ali, "my plan is this: We all creep forward till we are in sight of the camp, then you and I go alone; I'll tell you how to act."

Ali had already proved himself so discreet a guide that Vincent readily agreed to be instructed by him. "Ali," said he, "you command, and we'll act."

"Then forward, sahib."

They crept on hands and knees, every now and then stopping for a second or two to breathe, then on again. As soon as they were in sight of the camp they all halted. Vincent peeped out from behind a bush and saw the dusky forms of men lying on the ground. Some little way from them he saw the stretcher on which Devaki lay. Close by, a man was standing on guard, leaning on a long spear, and so motionless that he looked like a bronze statue. While Vincent still watched, he saw him suddenly leap a couple of feet into the air, then fall heavily to the ground.

There he lay close to Devaki, and there was not a movement in him.

"Is that the usual way these fellows tumble into bed?" asked Vincent of Ali, who was on the other side of a bush, behind which both had concealed themselves.

"He is dead, sahib," was the quiet reply.

"Dead!" cried Vincent.

"Hush, sahib. If you speak so loud you will rouse the others. Yes, he is dead. The arrow I fired has gone to his heart. By Allah! my hand is still in. I thought I had forgotten how to find the heart with an arrow. It is years since I used a bow. When I was young, many——"

"Yes, yes, you did many great things—and evils too," said Vincent, interrupting his boastful speech. "Ali, are you forgetting that Devaki is lying there?"

"Allah forbid! Now, sahib, follow me. You others remain here behind this fallen tree. Spread out. . . . That's it. No noise, mind you. Follow me, sahib, on your hands and knees and have your pistols ready for use."

With great caution they crawled along. Nearer and nearer they approached where Devaki, gagged and bound hand and foot, was lying on a bamboo stretcher. Vincent's heart beat fast. The inclination to spring forward and unbind Devaki was strong in him, but by a masterly effort he overcame this feeling, which he knew, did he act on its promptings, would be his and Devaki's death. So he crawled on. Just now, one of the wild men moved a bit, then sat up. He sniffed the air as if he scented danger, and made ready to shoot with his bow and arrow. One glance he gave towards the sentry, and seeing him, as he thought, asleep, muttered something like a curse and was about to spring to his feet, when an arrow from Ali's bow gave him his *quietus*. Ali crept round to where Devaki's head was, and Vincent took hold of the bamboo poles of the stretcher at the other end, and they lifted the girl off the ground and carried her in the direction of the fallen tree behind which the five soldiers were hidden. As they went carefully along Ali looked back. "Let Devaki down," said he in a hoarse whisper to Vincent. This was done immediately, and Ali, placing an arrow in his bow, fired at a man who had sprung to his feet. Before, however, the arrow pierced his brain, the Ghond gave a loud shout, and the dusky

forms, till now lying motionless, became full of life and activity. Meanwhile Ali and Vincent picked up the stretcher again, and ran as hard as they could go towards the fallen tree. They gained it just as a shower of arrows flew past them. With loud yells the wild men came on at a run. "Shoulder! Fire!" cried Vincent. Five rifles rang out, and three men fell to the ground; a fourth dropped a second later, an arrow having pierced his brain. For a moment they hesitated. Vincent feared another charge, for the soldiers' rifles were empty; he, therefore, in quick succession fired both his pistols. This decided the Ghonds how to act. They immediately disappeared in the woods.

"Allah be praised!" exclaimed Ali. "If they had charged, we should all have tasted of the banquet of death."

"Do you think they will return again?" asked Vincent, as he reloaded his revolvers.

"They will follow us now, wherever we go, trying to pick us off, one by one."

Vincent now went up to Devaki and cut away the cords that bound her.

"Devaki," he whispered as he knelt by her side and chafed her hands.

"Sahib," was all she could utter before she began to cry. Closer and closer she drew Vincent's face towards her, till her lips could touch his cheek. Then she whispered: "Sahib, I told you a lie this morning: I said I did not love you. It is the only lie I have ever told. God alone, sahib, knows how much I love you."

Notwithstanding that Ali was looking on, Vincent kissed Devaki over and over again.

"Sahib," said Ali, "if you want to be killed, remember we do not."

Vincent sprang to his feet.

"Fool that I am!" he cried. "Quick, Ali; lift Devaki."

"Nay, sahib, let two of the soldiers do that. We'll have to fight our way through to Major Hoyles."

"I'll walk," said Devaki, rising to her feet, but her limbs were so cramped that she nearly fell. Vincent, making a much more comfortable couch, placed her again on the stretcher, and the two soldiers told off by Ali carried her. They had not advanced far when they saw dark figures darting in and out of the woods.

"They are waiting, sahib," said Ali, "till they get us in a

cleared spot, then they will shoot us down. But I'll take good care that I'll not lead to any cleared spot."

"I should have thought," said Vincent, "that they would attack us while in the woods, concealing themselves behind trees and firing."

"No, sahib," returned Ali; "it is difficult for them to shoot with any success because of the thickness of the woods here, and they must come close to aim. They are afraid of doing that, for they will run the risk of being shot."

"It will be very late before we reach Hoyles," said Vincent. "To-morrow night we must be before Yakoob's stronghold."

"We'll be there," said Ali confidently, but adding shortly afterwards—"if we are not all killed."

Ali's explanation of the reason why the wild men did not attack the party was soon found to be correct. Vincent discovered that they were gradually being driven out of their direct course. This was effected in the following way: the wild men got on to the right and front of the little party and threatened an attack; but Ali swerved around, little by little, till he was going in a direction quite opposite from whence they had come.

Vincent called Ali's attention to this, but the latter replied he would change his course in a minute. They walked on straight now, for the object the wild men had in view was accomplished—that of getting the party in the direction they wanted them to march.

Presently Vincent and his men heard loud yells. Ali immediately called a halt.

"Quick, sahib, to some shelter," cried he. "We have fallen into a nest of Ghonds. Hundreds of them surround us."

Vincent lifted Devaki off the stretcher and carried and placed her behind a fallen tree, then he assisted Ali and the soldiers to construct some rude defences of boughs of trees, behind which they determined to fight to the last.

"Sahib," said Devaki, coming to his side, "you have two pistols in your belt; give me one and I'll fight too."

"You, Devaki? Lie down behind that tree. You'll be killed if you stand here. Why, you do not know how to fire a pistol."

"But I can learn, sahib. And I prefer death to falling into the hands of those men."

"But, Devaki——"

"Sahib, in this matter I will not listen to you. The more

there are to fight, the better. It is getting late, sahib ; show me how to use the pistol."

Seeing it was useless reasoning with her, Vincent did as he was asked ; and Devaki blushed with pleasure when Vincent called her a brave girl. There was not much time for further conversation, however, for the Ghonds, having arranged their plans, were now coming on. Slowly at first they advanced. Then, while yet five hundred yards off, they got into a clear passage and broke into a run, which increased in speed as they approached nearer to the square.

"Present Fire!" cried Vincent, and three of the five soldiers discharged their pieces. Though three of their men fell, the Ghonds still charged on. The reserve was now ordered to fire, and this discharge sent the wild men to the right-about. Immediately the danger was over for the time, Vincent turned to see how Devaki was, and he was glad to find she was unhurt. The excitement had brought quite a colour to her face.

"Are you hurt?" asked Vincent, to make doubly sure that none of the flying arrows and spears had wounded her.

"Not a scratch, sahib," replied the girl, laughing. "See!" she exclaimed, "I, too, fired."

"Well done, Devaki!" cried Vincent. "I little thought, when I saw you for the first time—when you were so shy and timid—that you would face a day like this. Come, now, help me lengthen these spears—there are a number lying about."

"How lengthen them, sahib?"

"Make two into one."

"What is that for, sahib?"

"You will not be afraid if I tell you?"

"Sahib!"

"I beg your pardon. Well, our ammunition is nearly out. The men brought but few charges with them."

"I understand you," said Devaki, without the trace of any fear on her face.

The spears were soon got ready, and each of them placed one at his side as he stood at his allotted post.

They had not long to wait for the second charge. With frightful yells the wild men rushed down upon the square, shooting their arrows and throwing their spears. One of the soldiers at Vincent's side fell wounded to the ground. There was no

time, however, to see to the man, for the wild men were close at hand. The soldiers fired volley after volley with their rifles, while Vincent and Devaki repeatedly discharged their pistols, and Ali sent not a few arrows into the ranks of the Ghonds. But to no effect. Although many of them fell, yet this time they did not turn and fly; their fury was at full pitch, and like a flood they burst upon the square, sweeping everything before them. Throwing aside their rifles, the soldiers seized their long spears and fought with them, while Vincent defended himself and Devaki with his sword. Ali and he, with their backs to a tree and Devaki crouching down between them, kept the Ghonds at bay. But their arms were beginning to ache, and they must soon give in, when a loud cheer—a British “Hurrah!”—burst upon their ears and gave renewed strength to their arms. The Ghonds heard the “hurrah” too. Still they hesitated whether to fight or run, when a discharge from about twenty rifles decided the question: they turned and fled into the woods.

“Saved! Thank God!” exclaimed Hoyles, taking Vincent’s hand. “And Devaki?”

“I am here, sahib.”

Hoyles lifted her from the ground and kissed her, while tears ran down his cheeks. “Thank God!” he muttered. “Thank God! Thank God!”

Vincent had left them and was attending to the wounded. Of the five soldiers, three were killed and one mortally wounded. He died while Vincent was examining him. All four were buried in one grave. The Ghonds were let lie where they were, for Ali said that their friends would come for them before long.

“How did you manage to find us?” asked Vincent of Hoyles.

“We are close at hand here. We heard firing, and thinking it might be your party, I hurried on with these men. How far did you think you were from us?”

“We had lost our bearings,” and Vincent told Hoyles, as they returned to camp, their adventures. Nor did he forget to mention Devaki’s bravery, much to the embarrassment of that young lady.

They reached the camp in about an hour’s time. It was now eleven o’clock.

“Sahib,” said Ali to Major Hoyles, “if we want to save Helen Missy we must start now.”

“Now?”

"Now, sahib. By daylight we'll reach Yakoob's den. Then the men can rest till night."

After consulting with Shilstone and Vincent, Hoyles gave the necessary orders, and within an hour's time the men were on the march again, and moving faster than hitherto, for they were now out of the jungle.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ROBBER STRONGHOLD.

AFTER a weary three hours' march, a halt was called and the men allowed to rest; then, after about an hour, the march was resumed. It was nearly sunrise when the soldiers entered a thick jungle, and by a path, known only to himself, Ali led them where no man would think of coming. No attack was to be made to-day, for Ali thought the fort too strong to be attacked in broad daylight by so few men.

Luckily, the men had brought extra provisions with them, and immediately set about making preparations for breakfast.

"Is sahib hungry? Or would sahib like to have a look at the fort?" asked Ali of Vincent.

"A look at the fort, by all means," said Shilstone, answering for himself and Vincent.

Having obtained permission from Hoyles, the two young men followed Ali, who quickly advanced into the thick jungle. Now, still under shelter of the umbrageous wood, they commenced climbing a steep hill.

"Be careful how you tread, sahibs," cautioned the guide. "There are men above us. Study every step. Feel the ground and displace no stones. If you follow carefully my track all will be well."

It was a long climb up the steep hill, and difficult. The summit, however, was gained in safety. The guide cautioned quietness, for he said that, two hundred yards from where they were, was a guard-house held by about twenty men.

Ali led them forward, and there, hardly a stone's-throw away, was the fort. The hills, in deep undulations, extended on all sides, and were clothed with impenetrable forests. The fort was built on an isolated hill, conical in shape. On every side of it were deep ravines, and thick jungles covered the hill, terminating only in the walls of the fort, which were four to five feet high.

In the centre of the fort rose a cone, and towered high above the fortifications. On the very top, here, was built a large mosque.

As the men yet examined the place, the interior of which was spread out to them, for the plateau on which they were, was on a level with the vertex of the cone and looked over the fortifications, they saw a man ascend one of the tall minarets of the mosque and, turning his face Mecca-wards, invite the faithful to prayers.

"It is the hour appointed for the *Es-sebah*, morning prayers," said Ali, and devout Mohammedan that he was, he spread out his handkerchief and knelt thereon.

On the still, clear air floated the call of the *Mueddin*:

"*A-i-a-e salah! A-i-a-e salah! A-i-a-e ala el felah! Es salaton hairoon min en naoom! La ilaha ila Allah!*"

Up the hill poured the worshippers; presently they divided and ranged themselves on each side of the steps leading to the mosque. Now a man richly clad, and before whom marched a guard, could be seen ascending. Vincent and Shilstone were not left long in doubt as to whom this personage might be, for Ali, springing to his feet and forgetting all about his devotions, shook his fist in the direction of the man as he exclaimed:

"That is the Khan, sahib! The dog! By Allah! this is the last morning service he'll attend."

Shilstone and Vincent soon took their gaze off the worshippers and began to minutely examine the fort.

"It would not be a bad plan," said Shilstone, "to post men around the fort on these hills, and, under cover of the woods, harass the enemy."

Ali did not approve of Shilstone's suggestion. Such a method, he argued, would necessitate delay. And then, the robbers knew so well the intricacies of the forest that they could easily escape if hard pressed; or, worse still, oust the few soldiers sent to besiege them.

Vincent, though he did not believe the robbers were capable of putting the English to flight, threw in his vote in favour of persuading Hoyles, who had some thoughts of attacking the fort by day, to surprise the robbers by night.

"Whereabouts is Missy Helen imprisoned?" asked Vincent.

"See that white house, surrounded by high walls, half-way up the hill?"

"Yes."

"That's it. She is alone there. The Khan's palace is on the other side. It is well fortified. But, it is written in the Book of Fate, he'll die to-morrow. But, sahib, see how light it is getting; we must away."

They quickly, but carefully, descended the hill, and now, as they were nearing the bottom, a "*Sch!*" escaped the guide's lips.

"What's the matter?" inquired Vincent in a whisper.

"Men coming. Hide here—quick."

They concealed themselves behind some thick bushes, and none too soon; for a body of twelve men now came in sight.

"Did none of you hear a noise?" asked one.

"By the Prophet! what a question. Are not these woods alive with wild animals?"

"You may laugh," said the first speaker, "but I've not lived a wild life for nothing. I can tell at once the tread of a man from a beast."

"Then have a hunt," replied he who had so quickly picked up and ridiculed the question asked. "Come, brothers, we'll rest while Hassan searches the woods."

"What will you give me, Moosa," asked Hassan, "if I bring you news, or prove to you that this track has been crossed by strange men this morning?"

"Five rupees."

"I accept your bet."

Every word of the conversation had been heard by those in the bush, and they prepared themselves to fight to the death.

"There are only twelve of them," said Shilstone in a whisper to Vincent. "We can easily manage four apiece."

"Yes," acknowledged Vincent. "But remember, Shilstone, we'll put the garrison on their guard by being discovered here. So don't be rash. Wait till we are actually discovered, then fight. Even then, in dire necessity only, use your pistols. We may be able to polish off all these beggars with our swords."

"Quiet now. Here comes the man," as Hassan, eager to win the bet, advanced towards the very bush in which they were.

The rest of the robbers spread themselves out on the ground, and one or two producing *hookahs*,* they began to smoke and gossip.

Hassan looked about him warily, and once or twice, stooping down, examined carefully the footprints in the dust. Nearer

* Hubble-bubbles.

and nearer he came, and now he was about stepping around the bush, when Moosa called out to him:

"Have a care, Hassan! It may have been *Sheitan** himself who created the noise."

Hassan, though he feared no man, lived in mortal dread of *Sheitan*. He turned pale and quickly retraced his steps, every now and then casting a glance over his shoulders to see if he were followed. Quietly, as he seated himself, he put his hand into his pocket and handed over five rupees to Moosa, who, with the others, was roaring with laughter.

"Well," said Kurrim, another of the band, "as we have seated ourselves, I propose we remain here awhile."

His proposition was carried, much to the annoyance of Shilstone and Vincent.

"Have you heard the news?" asked Kurrim.

"What news, brother?" inquired Moosa.

"The Khan is going to give a big *khana*† to the whole garrison to-night. There will be a *tomasha*‡ also, to-morrow, for the Khan is going to wed the Faringi girl."

Vincent started and stood up. Ali and Shilstone held him.

"Be quiet," whispered Shilstone. "You'll betray us in a minute."

"Hear that?" asked Hassan.

"Hear what?" asked his companions.

"A noise in the bush."

"A noise again!" exclaimed Moosa. "Will you take another bet?"

The others laughed, and Hassan kept a sullen silence after this.

"About this *khana* to-night. We'll miss the feast," grumbled Suliman, an obese creature.

"Not we," replied Kurrim. "The whole of us are to collect in the fort to-night. The Khan says there is no fear of our retreat being discovered."

"*Shabash! Shabash!*" cried one and all.

"Heard anything of Ali?" asked Moosa of no one in particular.

"Nothing," replied Kurrim. "I'm sorry he and the Khan have fallen out."

* The evil one.

† Dinner.

‡ Entertainment.

"So am I. Do you think he'll split on us now?"

"If dead men can, he will."

This drew a laugh.

"Dead? No one found his body."

"After the flogging, do you remember, he ran away, and the Khan fired at him."

"Well?"

"I saw him drop with my own eyes. We did not search for the body till evening, and by that time, no doubt, there was a feast going on somewhere in the forest."

The *hookahs* had now gone the complete round of the company; so Moosa, who appeared to be in charge, made the men "fall in," and marched them off.

As soon as the coast was clear, the guide quickly made his way towards the camp, followed by the two Englishmen.

"Ali, were you really hit?" asked Vincent, as they descended the hill.

"No," laughed the guide. "I made as if I were, then slipped into the bushes, and soon as it was dark, slowly journeyed to Mariepoor, bringing Devaki with me."

The camp was reached in safety. Hoyles had been very anxious about the doctor and Shilstone, thinking Ali had betrayed them. He, however, changed his opinion about the guide when Shilstone related to him the conversation they had been compelled to listen to.

The whole of that day Vincent was in a state of excitement. He hailed the setting of the sun with joy. Now he became less uneasy in mind, and ate and drank and talked.

"When do we start, Ali?" he inquired.

"About two in the morning."

Here was a damper to his cheerfulness, and once more he sobered down. His conversation, too, after this, lacked spirit.

By now the sun had gone to rest, and soon, from out the bosom of the east, sprang night, who, unfolding her dark mantle from about her, spread it in the heavens and enveloped earth in blackness.

(To be continued.)